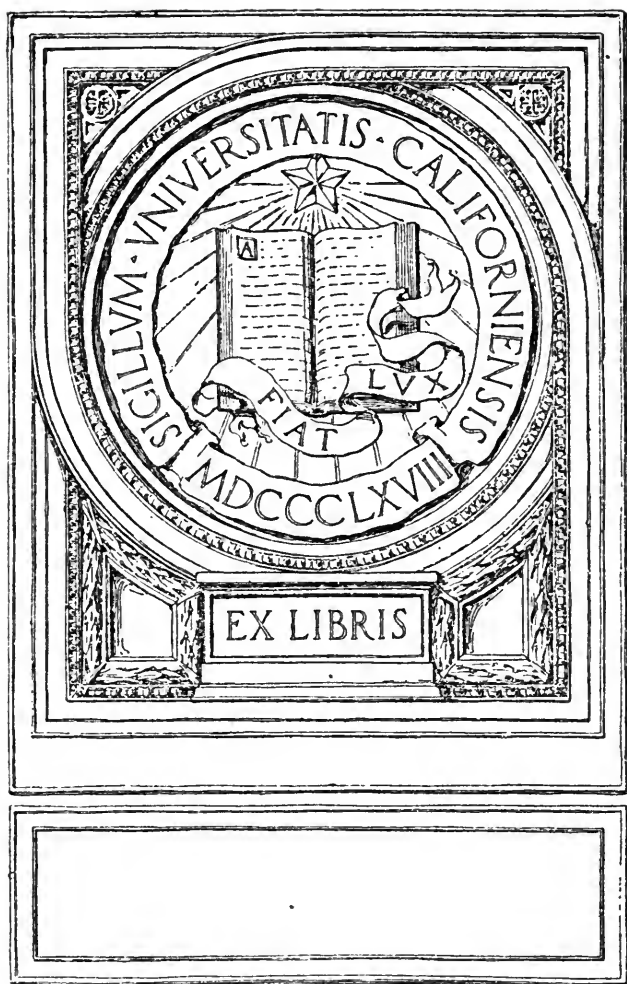


LETTERS OF A  
V.A.D.

W. H. AND









LETTERS OF A V.A.D.

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# *Letters of a V.A.D.*

By  
R. E. LEAKE

pseud.

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THE NEW  
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161  
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let

To  
MY MOTHER

From whom I have borrowed many things  
to

MY BELOVED BROTHERS

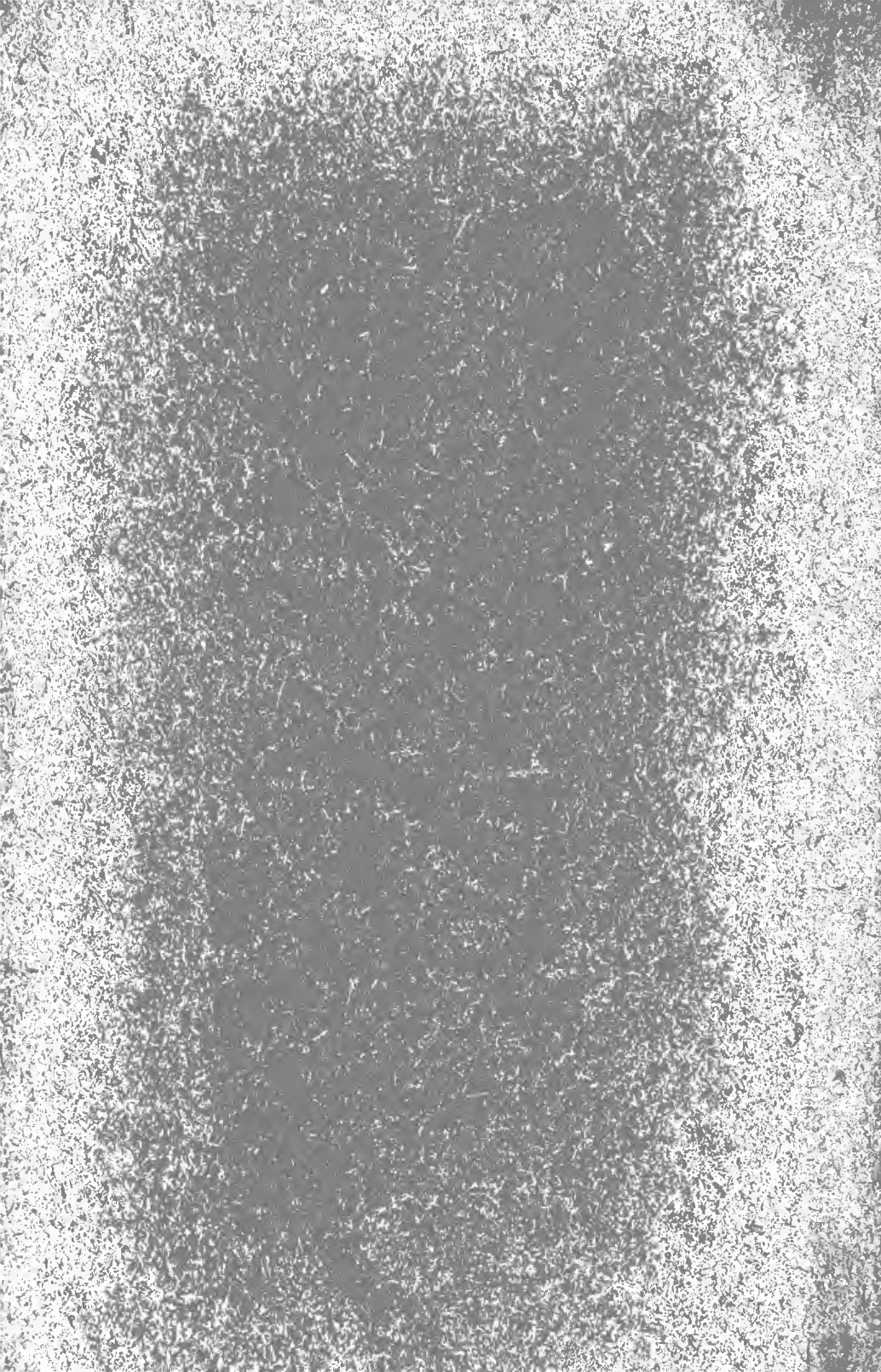
one of whom is wounded and missing and the other wounded  
and to

THOSE FRIENDS

who have encouraged and helped me

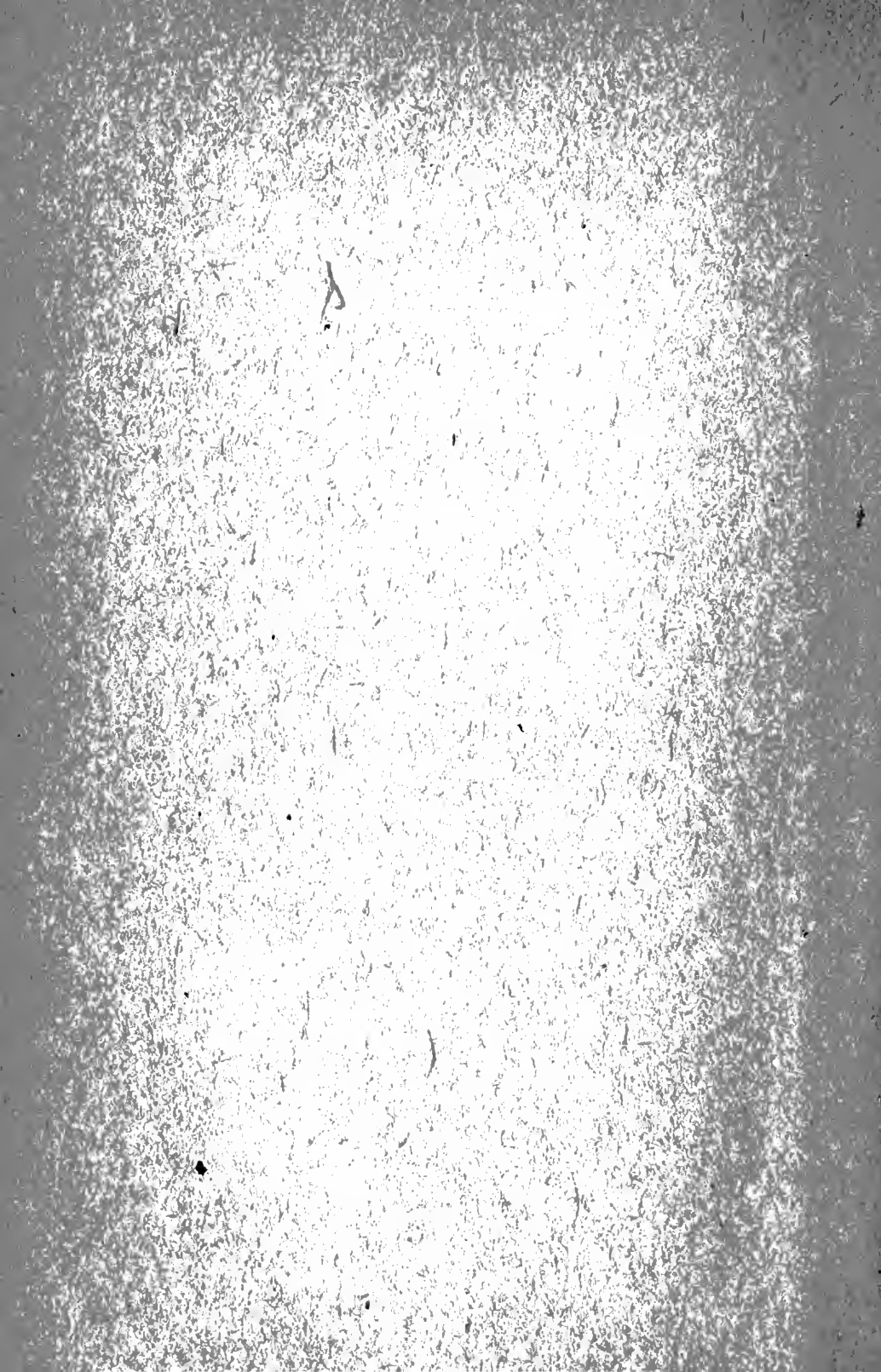
I dedicate  
this Book with  
gratitude and love.

447961



“Soldiers, your deeds have won a place in the Temple of the Immortals, the world has hailed you as heroes. Your comrades—have claimed you as brothers of the Empire. But—to your mothers, fathers, brothers and friends who know and love you, your glorious valour meant more than to all others. On its shining wings we are lifted up to heights we have never seen : you taught us truths we never knew, and you inspired us to another newer, better, and nobler conception of life.”

W. M. HUGHES.





## LETTER I

*January 15th.*

**H**ERE we are at sea.

And you are at home, which spells everything best in life : a fire on a cold night ; toast for tea ; friends who love you ; letters, nice fat white ones ; the sunshine on snow ; fresh primroses in a basket ; going off duty after a heavy day ; getting into bed when you are weary ; a hot bath, and, oh ! “ ‘Ome, ‘ome, ‘ome,” as Johnnie used to yell. And *his* home !

But it’s mine I want, or is it only you ! Every minute I want you, even when I am so very, dreadfully, awfully sick ; with all my heart and soul I want you.

And, in case anything does happen, know for certain, that I loved you and wanted you up to the very last moment ; for what with the fog, and the rough sea, and the things under the sea and above

## LETTERS

the fog which the Germans have made, we might be blown sky high, or sunk fathoms deep at any moment; therefore, this goes by the Pilot to bring you my love. My love now and always.

Yours,

R. X.

LETTER II

*January 22nd.*

WITH joyful alacrity I seized upon this opportunity to write once more to you, my little sister ; though I feel rather guilty, for out of the corner of my eye, behold Criss-Cross prowling round, longing for the pen, hungering for it—wishing to demand it by virtue of her rank. Only all men are equal at present, I mean women—though we are in uniform ; and she went out of the saloon just at the very moment that Fluff threw it down. (But who is “ Criss-Cross ” you ask ? and who is “ Fluff ” ? Wait, and I’ll tell you all about them soon.) Perhaps Fluff did it on purpose ! There is you see only this pen, this ink, and this abominable paper for us to use for our correspondence. And then how, when and where will we be able to post ! That is hidden with the secrets of the Mighty.

Our “ Detachment ” does not satisfy me. I like

## LETTERS

the men so much better than the women : which is such a pity, because it is so much safer and more comfortable to have a friend of one's own sex to confide in, to live with, to suffer alongside, and I have a very friendly soul, worse luck. How much more delightful to be independent, sufficient unto one's self, and entirely self-reliant as the Army Sisters in charge of us are. Criss-Cross—one of the Army Sisters—I could love ; but the other alarms me. She—this other—is round and sturdy and strong, with an unusually white face and a tongue which is trained to biting sarcasm. She has no doubt risen by that tongue, for she is Senior Sister, is occasionally at sixes and sevens with her h's ; rolls r's which are not always present ; and is quite young—for a Sister. Nothing daunts her, she is never sea-sick, she seems to have no feelings (which you always say do not matter in the least—but they *count*), and she has complete control of the “ female portion of the detachment.” Therefore we call her “ the Bloodless One ” ; Criss-Cross, on the contrary, is most gentle and courteous. She is thin, and quite good looking, ten years older than most of us, and most unfriendly to every one but the Senior, whom she backs up, even when it is quite unnecessary.

The rest of us are “ Red Cross,” except I, who am

## OF A V.A.D.

V.A.D., as you know, and we all fall very far short of the Sisters' ideal of good nurses; because, circumstances not permitting, we were not "properly trained" in their eyes. Even Stock, who has a three years' certificate from a small Provincial Hospital, and Shack, who has the same from a Colonial Hospital, fail to reach the standard of the "properly trained."

The Sisters "properly trained" despise us completely. You did not warn me of this. I therefore let myself in, when I spoke with affection of "Our Hospital." I had no business to do that, I was only there for two years!

Why do they set such store on their training! It is not on their capabilities, their nursing powers, their administrative propensities; these they also possess; but simply on the fact that they spent four years in a certain training school. Therefore no one who has not done likewise has any right to any consideration as a Nurse at all! The old story, one supposes, of the Master of the Vineyard who was blamed for giving a penny a day to the last comers, as well as the first. They *have* borne the burden and heat of the day—nothing can take the glory of that away; but why condemn us for trying to do our bit? If we all had gone into Hospitals to be trained for even three years at the

## LETTERS

beginning of the War, it would have been over, we hope, before we were ready, and what would "poor Tommie do then, poor thing"?

The men are very different. The Colonel is an iron-grey cloud of a man—with a beautiful silver lining. He is very hipped just now. They say he has recently divorced his wife, and has two daughters to whom he is devoted, still at school. How sorrow ages and depresses some men. The Colonel makes you recollect that phrase "and would not be comforted." He is a great worker, and has a lot of ribbons, and had a V.C. twice; also some letters after his name, over "Something he did in France." The Black man is the Senior Surgeon—he is very keen, very bright, very dark, and very clever. I should imagine he will be delightful to work under—and I only hope every one won't fall in love with him, or he with any one—because he looks, to put it mildly, "very lovable." The Red Cross man is the Sergeant—and he is an enigma, for he has made one or two very significant, very epigrammatic remarks, which have made me feel interested in him on one or two occasions when I have been in the surgery—for there is one on this ship:—also a dispensary, an operation room, and many, many cots.

And—I've forgotten to mention the White Mouse,

## OF A V.A.D.

whom Fluff has named so very accurately, for he is very fair, even to his eyebrows, with small brown bright eyes—and long tapering fingers with pink tips and polished nails. They say he is an extraordinarily keen surgeon, but is very junior and very quiet and young.

Now I must really hand over the pen to Criss-Cross, but not before I have sent you my dearest love. I am “too much at sea” to quite realize anything: except that I do love you always, you may be sure of that.

Yours,

R. X.

## LETTER III

*January 30th.*

A MAIL from home met us at the first Port we touched at, which we left yesterday, and I am hugging your dear letter to my heart.

It was all very interesting on shore, but I must not tell you the name of the place, or where we are going, though we now pretty well guess !

Fluff and I went ashore together, and Fluff was very bored indeed because I insisted on visiting Notre Dame, until, on the very steps thereof, we ran into the Black man who stayed with us, much to my annoyance and Fluff's satisfaction : both of which emotions greatly increased, when we again ran into the Sisters, also visiting this impressive Church. Criss-Cross, it seems, is very High Church like me (No ! don't grimace ; for the life of me I cannot call myself " Catholic " yet), and the other is Non-Conformist—she would be ; and it was almost as great a sin to her to step into



## OF A V.A.D.

the beautiful Notre Dame as it would be for a real Catholic (Oh, I cannot help it, in spite of Padre's teaching) to step into one of her kirks at home; and she had the audacity to sniff with scorn at the side altars, although she had nothing at all to say about Our Blessed Lord's Presence, which I am sure she could feel; for she was so silent until we came to the statue of the "Protectress of the Sea" when she said: "That is a graven image."

"Why, of course it is!" I answered very pleasantly; and perhaps rather pertly. "Who ever said it was anything else?"

"They bow down and worship such things, in these heathen countries," she said, fixing her cold eye on me disapprovingly; "I have no patience with such practices."

The Red Cross man here seemed to have floated up to us in the dark; I am sure neither of us had noticed him before, it is so very dusky in this Church: and he said dreamily, almost inconsequently, looking heavenward at a small model sailing-ship hanging over our heads:

"I've just bought a little bronze statue of Lord Roberts, Sister; but I don't mean to worship it."

The Sister answered not. I have no doubt that it was quite unprofessional for him to address us

## LETTERS

at all, for she was really quite angry now, though I had said no more than I have repeated—perhaps that was enough—and her gaze had never left my face. The Red Cross man floated away as he had come.

“Are you then,” she asked at length of me,—  
“Are you a Roman Catholic?”

“No, worse luck!” I answered firmly, “I only wish I were. I am an Anglican.”

This was too much for her, she joined Criss-Cross and drew her away, leaving us to the mercy of the Black man, and the Mouse, who had turned up, so that we all went off together, to see the other sights, and tramp gladly on *terra firma* once more.

There were lots of soldiers and sailors [about, of the Allied Nationalities, and the scene was very gay and joyous, for all seemed to have thrown off the thought of War, and to be bathing in sunshine and gladness. The houses in this place are unusual, and were fascinatingly foreign in our eyes—tall and green latticed; and the streets picturesquely narrow and cobbled. The shops too seemed like dreamland shops, all out on the pavement. We had coffee and liqueurs at one, and vendors brought their wares to our feet. We laughed and chatted gaily, but a great yearning was in my heart which I could not define—or repress, and I was glad after all to get

## OF A V.A.D.

back to the rocking old ship, and to get away to sea once more that night.

But the yearning came again overwhelmingly. I was aware of the War : of the ineffable sadness, and sin, and pain in the world, going on all the time, crying out from the great shadows : " Is there no one to hear ! No one to care ! "

The stars twinkled overhead ; the ship moved cautiously over the sparkling water shrouded in darkness, dim, mysterious ; the harbour light, there was only one, twinkled astern : the town lay in gloom.

Then out of the night came words, they came with a great lifting of the depression which had settled upon me—not that they reminded me of anything in particular, for where I heard them I do not know. Do you ?

" Star of the Ocean,  
Star of the Sea,  
Pray for poor sinners,  
Pray for me."

So " good-night," little sister mine.

Yours,

R. X.

SOMEWHERE AT SEA,

*February 6th.*

This following is going to be an exceedingly uninteresting letter and you need not read it unless

## LETTERS

you like, but it had to be written, since it's from me to you. I am really ashamed of it, since it is nothing but one big long grumble all the way through: but, like Jane,

“I beg to explain  
That I never will do it again!”

At least I will try not to, for I am not a grumbler as a rule, am I? Oh! my little sister, how I long to have you here. Then I should not grumble at all, but be happy all the day long, under any circumstances whatever. I suppose the truth of the matter is, that you spoilt me completely; that everybody always has spoilt me, and that now it is being shown to me, perhaps for my soul's sake—how very horrid and impatient and tiresome one can be to other people—probably to God also, and most certainly to myself—and I put it all down to the Bloodless One.

Oh! that I might be like St. Theresa—was it not St. Theresa?—who ate rotten eggs, and smiled over them—or did she offer them? At any rate she ate them—manfully, as I wish that I could eat mine—like that, with grace.

## OF A V.A.D.

### LETTER IV

*February 7th.*

**W**E went ashore at another foreign place yesterday—it was very delightful :

“ The spicy sea-pinks and the inborne spray,  
The tawny sands, and the moon.”

Those are left behind and once again is :

“ Our vessel plunging deeper into night  
To reach a land unknown.”

We posted our letters there—you may see the postmarks—but of course we received none. Oh, how blissful it will be to receive our letters when they reach us at last ! I am very home-sick.

It is the Bloodless One who worries me so ! She will not leave me alone. It's “ relics ” this time.

You know that I do not know anything about relics—but if other people reverence them, why not leave them alone ! We go into other people's countries and march about criticizing their houses

## LETTERS

and manners and customs, and cannot even let their religion alone. No wonder Hindus object to allowing people into their temples—or is it Mahomedans?

There is only one excuse for a visit of this sort—reverence, or at least intense and respectful interest.

There is a famous church at this place too; famous in that it contains certain relics of our Lord Himself, but as I was with the Colonel, who did not suggest going there, we did not see it.

We met a Procession, however, which was perfectly sweet. It must have been in honour of Our Lady, for there were so many statues of her, and little “Children of Mary,” in white frocks, with blue capes, carrying flowers and throwing them about, and I did recognize some of the other things, but did not like to talk about it, as the Colonel was obviously rather bored; so I gave myself up to him for the time being, and asked Criss-Cross in the saloon after dinner to tell me some more about it; and about the relics.

She was quite-polite about it, for she is interested too, and went to get some picture post-cards, and a flower she had picked up. Then the Bloodless One fell upon me.

“Are you sure you are not a Papist?”

“Quite.”

## OF A V.A.D.

“ Then why do you take so much interest in these things ? ”

“ What things ? ”

“ Men dressed up in silk and lace, parading the streets with wax figures, and lighted candles, and that sort of thing.”

“ It’s symbolical ; besides, it stirs people up and reminds them of their religion.”

“ That’s just the point : stirs up their emotions ! So do incense and music ; flowers and ceremonies.”

“ Don’t you hate to go to places where your feelings are damped ? Is it right for people to entertain you, *sans* music, *sans* flowers, *sans* ceremony ? ”

“ You entirely waive the point. What have my friends entertaining me to do with it ? ”

“ If they want to please you, they shower upon you what they can : flowers, gifts, praise, smiles. And these people want to please God, so they give these things—namely, what they can.”

“ Yes, and I suppose you call it pleasing God to cross yourself, worship little pieces of wood, rusty nails, and Statues of the Virgin Mary—why, with my own eyes I saw a man fall on his knees and kiss her feet ! ”

(Oh, Mother of Our Divine Lord, do men realize

## LETTERS

Thy purity and sweetness enough to do that!) I thought that, but I said :

“ With mine, I once saw a man fall on his knees before a portrait of his mother, who had died. *He* kissed the paint.”

“ Paugh ! You agree, then, that they should put the Virgin Mary first ? ”

“ They do not put her first. Just now you said they crossed themselves. When they do that they say ‘ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost ’ : so that they put the Father always first, or rather the Blessed Trinity, for that is the first thing they always do, and they reverence, not worship, the wood and nails, for they have touched our Lord, Who said “ I and the Father are one.”

“ At any rate (1) they don’t know what He said, (2) for they do not read the Bible.”

“ Of course they read the Bible and they are *taught* what He said. The gospel is read to them every Sunday at least, as it is read to us. Why, the Bible came from them ! They preserved it, and cherished it, and copied it, and translated it long before Non-Conformists were thought of. But the laity are not encouraged to interpret the Scriptures to their own satisfaction. It is so exceedingly puzzling, for any one can find a complicated text



## OF A V.A.D.

somewhere in the Book, that might mean anything. For instance, I believe the Mormons built up their religion on the 'Word of God.' Christ did not write the Bible, we never hear of Him writing at all. He always taught, and He said to His disciples 'Go and *teach* all nations.' And then long before that, in Deuteronomy you read, 'The lips of the Priests shall keep knowledge, and they shall seek the law out of his mouth.' "

"You are quoting the Bible which you despise so much."

"I do not despise it; nothing more beautiful has ever been written, in my eyes, than St. John's Gospel, and I know it very well indeed, for I was brought up as a Presbyterian, was at a Protestant school, and later studied the English Catholic movement. And it seems to me that every different denomination has a different interpretation of Christ's religion, and that there is no reason why Catholicism, which was the first—its very name means Universal—should not be the right one."

"Why don't you call yourself one, and have done with it?"

"Alas! Myself when young did eagerly frequent  
Doctor and Saint and heard great argument  
Around it, and about: but ever-more  
Came out by the same door as in I went."

## LETTERS

"I have learnt the Longer Catechism and the Shorter Catechism, but I still have to learn the Catholic Catechism, in more ways than one."

Criss-Cross here came in, with the post-cards and the flower : Criss-Cross, who is the essence of good breeding, reticence, and equanimity. I was glad to see her—though she does not love me either. She went straight over to the Bloodless One, and I heard her say : " Look at this picture, at the little stand which contains the relics of Our Lord ; it is so exactly like the case of relics which stands in the hall of your Hospital, Sister. You know the little stand which I mean : the one in which they preserve the shovel with which one of the Georges laid the foundation, and the seal——"

" Scored ! " whispered Fluff, pulling me down on to the settee beside her. " You were a brick to tackle her. But I don't believe in a word of all that rubbish you were talking."

Fluff is friendly and quite nice, but extraordinarily clever over giving a different impression externally to her acts and thoughts. For instance, she is always with the Black man ; she tells me so ; but she is seldom seen with him, and she declares she dislikes him, which the Sisters believe. On the contrary, I now spend a good deal of time with the Colonel and like him very much, and say so, and get

## OF A V.A.D.

into sad trouble! No! I will not hide, and I insist on continuing to behave as I have been brought up to do, as far as possible, and, like Pope—

“See what friends,  
And read what books  
I please.”

What it will be like when work begins passes one's comprehension! I only hope it won't be past one's powers of endurance!

For instance, I went to look for my “Imitation” which had been left on deck, and the old sailor-deck steward told me that the Sister had made him throw it overboard, as it was Popish nonsense. I don't suppose he wanted much making, for he is a wretched-old-man-of-the-sea who throws everything over. He told me it was the easiest way to clear decks, and anything, more or less, these days didn't count. “There must be,” he added, looking dreamy and romantic, “a world of odd things down below for them mermaids to play with.” He makes you feel “Salt” to look at him, yet he makes you shudder, he is so material and grotesque, and somehow horrible.

So, you see, I cannot say a nice word about anybody! Except the Colonel—who is a dear—so nice, and gentle, and sympathetic—only of course

## LETTERS

I do not grumble to him, he would soon dislike me very much if I did! How human nature loathes other people's grumbles! And has he not his own troubles! Though they seem to be lightening, as the grey cloud I compared him to, seems to vanish when you know him, into its lining of brightness, like "Cully" when he sings "To myself I said." He whistles that. We have much in common, for he loves the places in England that I love; and gardens, and poetry and literature. The Sisters say that he is a dreamer, and obsolete—obsolete! But they are frightfully polite to his face. They know he cannot be that, for he has such a reputation for Administrative Work and Organization, only their one idea of bliss seems to be to see every patient rushed on to the "table," and this the Colonel does not approve of at all, so they do not approve of him. Service work is his sphere, and he has a row of ribbons, and a double V.C.—but I think I told you that.

Another complaint is—

("What! Another? and Another?")

—Is my seat at table. They have put me at the foot under the porthole, and one or two nurses, whom I have no desire to mention, because they do not belong to our outfit, but are getting free passages somewhere, are next me. I do not know them,

## OF A V.A.D.

and I do not like them. They giggle, they make eyes, and their conversation when they do open their mouths is altogether idiotic. Now remember I did not want to mention them, but I must, because they won't pass me things, and as the stewards are few and far between, I get practically nothing to eat!

Indeed, I have come down to drink the dregs of the cup : and am so thin and miserable, for perhaps hardest of all to bear is my being constantly reprimanded before these girls, and one of them saying when I was silently struggling with angry tears, and a choked retort, " Now don't be a martyr ! " Oh, my dear, my grace these days is : " Lord, make me meek and humble of heart," for I can't say the other at all. What a long letter this has been : but what a relief to write it.

It is not worth the paper it is written on—but it does come " hopping to find you well," and it brings all my love.

Always your  
R. X NURSE.

## LETTERS

### LETTER V

*February 16th.*

WELL, here we are.

Strangers in a strange land indeed. Bewildering it is. People chatter to you in an unknown tongue, dance round you, gesticulate. Others, strangers whom you meet, give you advice which you cannot possibly follow. An English lady poured forth instructions to us this morning at the breakfast table, in the hotel, which Fluff told her she would certainly carry out. But Stock simply remarked, "We are living on our pay—some of us," and the lady said, "You won't be able to do it," and Shack said, "We are going to try,"—so I think that person gave us up as a bad job—even Fluff, for she has not spoken to us again.

No one seems to know what to do with us. Where we are to be sent, or if we are to be posted here. No one knows anything, in fact, except the Mighty.

## OF A V.A.D.

Perhaps they don't know ! We do not seem to have been expected.

However, it is just lovely to be on dry land again. To sleep in a proper bed, to see the trees and flowers and birds, to eat white bread, and fresh butter, and drink fragrant tea. Tea is a ripping drink, isn't it ? Oh, I do like the land so much better than the sea, don't you ? Yet the sea possessed my ancestors—in more ways than one. So we are all thoroughly enjoying the pretence that we are tourists : we love the feel of the streets under our feet, the smell of the country after rain, the roll of carriage wheels carrying us hither and thither. Shops even seem an innovation. It's a delight to look through glass windows at silks, shawls, lace, precious stones, watches, necklaces, rings ; who would dream that a War was raging almost within sound ! Groceries fascinate the eye—and the kindly fruits of the earth, oranges piled high, golden luscious melons, pineapples and great clumps of bananas. Then, last but not least, the enormous chemist's shop is delightful. We have fizzy drinks there : for Fluff will haunt its precincts, and I love the scents of its powders, perfumes, soaps, face creams, hair-washes even, and what not. So, it seems, does the White Mouse, for twice we have met him coming down the steps. Stock says he goes to have his nails mani-

## LETTERS

cured, but more likely it is to have that smooth light hair of his, and white moustache, trimmed. Anyway, he is a good Surgeon, and always "willing and gentle" as they say of horses—and he, as well as all the rest of us, are ready, nay anxious to go forward, forward to where all these things are not—to where hunger and grief and pain will be our lot. But, as the Red Cross man says, "the future may never come; the present you *have*": we are really enjoying the present.

Only it would have been nice to have had letters from you, waiting here, dear heart. Not that you possibly could have sent them, but it was a disappointment to land, and not to get them. Oh! when will they come I wonder! Perhaps next week; perhaps not for months! But I will not suggest such a dreadful thought even to myself. The others are just as badly off.

Yours always with love,

R. X NURSE.



LETTER VI

*February 23rd.*

The dew is on the roses,  
The bat is on the wing,  
And vocal are the noses  
Of Coster and of King—  
In fact, the world reposes :  
But I do no such thing.

SO—I am on night duty. How strange it is in a strange country. But the wards are almost the same as at home. The same rows of beds shrouded in gloom, the same quiet figures lying patiently side by side—how patient Hospital cases are ! They become unselfish, I suppose catching the disease one from another ! Even old Granny, at home, used to whisper, “ I’m as wide awake as a ’addock, and as dry, if you would kindly give me a drop more o’ that pain killer I might die,” (she meant draught—and, sleep of course) “ and not waken the others : for it do upset them so to be

## LETTERS

waked, poor things." Yet she never kept quiet for two minutes in the daytime, they said . . . the same breakfast and "washings" and "dressings." Which reminds me to say, that I am very humble and grateful to those who so well taught me. Thanks to them, I can quite manage this new and hostile ward—for it was hostile being new. That's the same as at home too—they always hate their night nurse changing, and, poor dears, I do not blame them. They are afraid of having their little privileges taken away, of tales being told, of a misunderstanding. The sick do so like to be understood without explanations.

I cannot think why I have been sent into Hospital here at all, away from our outfit; but they are probably short-handed and the Bloodless One thought discipline would be good for me. Well, so it is.

It's a queer Hospital run by the R.A.M.C., and quite new since the War; and it is a very strange, not to say unpleasant, experience to me working in it away from the others. It is a large temporary plank building, a great barn of a place, and a perfect wilderness; for they have run up ward after ward until it has become a sort of huge rabbit warren. But how sad it is! This is the Base—the Basest of the Base, so to speak, the last place the soldiers

## OF A V.A.D.

arrive at, before they are shipped home ; or, if they belong to the country, for convalescence.

There are Natives, and Territorials, and Regulars, and Australians, all mixed up in the greatest confusion. No wonder they get lost sometimes, if they lose their wits or have been unconscious.

“ No, I’m not H. Smith of the 2/10th.—I’m H. Smith of the 1/4th ! ” one is constantly explaining—and *he* has a sense of humour ! It is rather bewildering when one has it brought to one’s notice how very many there are with the same surname—indeed with the same Christian name as well.

They are such dears, most of them, so pleased to *look* at you even, because you have just come from home, and have not been soiled by the War yet. Your clothes, you see, are still new and fresh—and the clothes of the Staff here are so worn and shabby ; indeed most of them look altogether like that—thoroughly washed out. We shall soon, no doubt, look the same, though I wonder if Fluff or the White Mouse ever will !

I see little or nothing of the others—being on night duty—but the Colonel has come with one of them once or twice and taken me for a motor drive. He also promises some golf.

The Night Superintendent interests me, she is unaffected and simple, but cool and self-contained,

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and takes no notice whatever of me, except to receive and give the report ; or do what has to be done in relation to the ward, and to me—as if we were so many pieces of bricks to be adjusted. She is, they say, very high up in the Service, and is only temporarily here. I have also seen the Great Lady under whom we were organized. She, of course, saw me not—but she is delightful. She is one of those creatures of God who simply radiate life, and health, and sumptuousness, and joy, and smiles, and well being. That was all : But is it not enough ? The Lord loveth a cheerful giver, and I am sure He loveth a joyous heart. Some people must be solemn and serious and quiet of course—but some can be cheerful and joyous and gay under any circumstances—for which the Lord be thanked.

\* \* \* \* \*

On Sunday I indulged in a thorough fit of the blues. Why had I come ? Of what use was it all ? Here I am despised and rejected ! At home loved and appreciated.

We all attended Church Parade—in uniform. Every one was in uniform and clattered when they stood up and sat down :—they sang “ Happy birds that sing and fly ” and “ The Church’s one foundation,” wearily and dispiritedly, and after it all

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“ God save the King ” with all their hearts and souls, so that it made your eyes smart. Then, after lunch I wandered out alone, and went back into the Garrison Church, and knelt down, and felt most forlorn. The altar is of pitch pine with a nice reredos, but it is cold. Oh ! so cold. Some birds flew about there, attracted perhaps by the hymn, but it was extraordinarily quiet and oppressive, and I soon came out, and wandered about till I reached the Cathedral. Arguments with the Bloodless One about Religion are very unsettling and entirely useless, and I really must make up my mind that silence is the “ better part of valour ” in the matter of Religious Controversy when one knows nothing at all about it. That is what is wrong with me—want of faith ; and I am groping in the dark again out here where no one seems to care for it at all, except the natives of the country, who dote on their little images and Calvaries and Shrines. Why have we not got these ? The Cathedral is Catholic, of course, and it smelt sweet with incense, but I think it must be Lent, for it was all covered up with purple cloths. Some day will you remember to tell me what the “ Colours ” they use in Churches mean—they must mean something, I suppose. Also who “ St. Catherine of Sienna ” was, for they think so much of her here. She always has a skull lying

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about near her, which also makes me wonder. She is not the Patron Saint of Doctors, for St. Luke is that. You yourself took me to a big service in St. Paul's Cathedral in London and explained it all, one St. Luke's day, when it was crammed with doctors and nurses. (I enjoyed that, for I must be rather sentimental, don't you think?) I shall also never forget when you took me there one Friday in Lent last year, when they sang that glorious rendering of the 51st Psalm "Miserere Mei, Deus,"—I am always so glad I learnt Latin with my brothers—of course in English, but how altogether lovely it was.

It did rather calm and control my restless imaginations kneeling in this church, but when I came out again I ran into the Black man, and we somehow became involved in a tremendous argument about marriage, divorce and celibacy—not altogether a usual topic of conversation for me, I must own, but we became involved, as I have just said, and I felt thoroughly unsettled again.

He said, I suppose thinking of the Colonel, that a divorcee should at once marry again, and that they generally did.

And I said, "Worse luck! for look at America!"

And he said, "What's wrong with America?"

And I said, "Some women have two or three husbands alive at once!"

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And he said, "Why not?" Because, arguing from a man's standpoint, celibacy is such "an awful infliction!" And Catholics were insane to expect it from their priests, though it *sounded* a "good moral point"; but that all Catholicism was but a "mass of superstition" from start to finish, and so on.

That is how they all talk and think, and I am so out of my element that I have a good mind to come straight home! Altogether cowardly, no doubt, but I want you so much to teach me more of your philosophy, and I do not want to dig alone in this wretchedly barren way.

Have pity upon me and talk to me on these questions when you write.

Your devoted,

R. X NURSE.

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### LETTER VII

*1st Sunday in March.*

NIGHT duty has me "round about emeshed" with all its starry silences, and its gloom and mystery. And I can hardly believe that what happened this morning, in the full sun's glory, really happened. But I do know that events did so take place, for when I was wakened with a cup of tea by the little maid at 8 p.m. I jumped out of bed as my wits returned, and looked at my garments—yes, dyed garments they now were, all smudged with gore! Dressing and eating the meal before one comes on night duty are always, in a kind of way, part of a blurred and dismal dream, and it is only now at midnight when all is quiet for some hours, one hopes, that I can concentrate my thoughts on the happenings of the morning.

We are not far from the sea, but it has not become clear how to reach the beach or the promenade just



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yet, so I went on the Quay for a walk, before going to bed for the day.

There is a very big harbour here, and the quay stretches a long way out to sea. It was good to walk along this in the fresh, sweet, salt, morning air—why does the sea smell so much more sweet and seay when one is beside it, than when one is on it?—with the sun sparkling on the waves, which were blue on the ocean side, and green on the harbour. But insensibly the sight of ships lying at anchor drew my thoughts towards home, and the pain one gets quite acutely round the place of one's heart's abode, came down upon me with great force. How extraordinarily simple it is to travel by sea! You simply step on a boat, live an ordinary life, eating, drinking, sleeping, talking, reading. No effort, and behold you arrive!

Ah, how I wanted to arrive! To walk in to you, dear sister, to hold out my hands that you might clasp them! But the water bubbled on round the boats, the waves rippled on in harmony with the wind, the seabirds went on swooping, and diving, and floating overhead, and the sun went on shining.

The quay was very deserted! Further back a few cars had flashed by me, bells had pealed and men in khaki or seafaring clothes had lounged about. It was Sunday morning, and the Sunday calm was

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over all, so that in spite of the pain, I felt near to God, clean and sweet and unstained ;—and yet very far from Him, very indefinite, very remote and minute, like a sea shell, a pebble, a grain of sand ! What are we to God ?

\* \* \* \* \*

A crowd at a pier head near a watchman's hut attracted me towards it, and as I wandered nearer, my eyes fell upon what they were watching. A small boat hurrying shorewards—surely a very common occurrence on a Sunday morning ! Yet there was an unusual stir, a sort of suppressed excitement about the crowd. Where had it collected from, anyway ? The watchman perhaps, a loafer or two, a sailor, a soldier—now myself. As I reached the little group the boat had gained the steps, and they were lifting from it the body of a man in dripping khaki.

The group of men were very quiet, perhaps dazed, for no one seemed to know what to do, as the two sailors who had rowed the boat laid the helpless body on the quay ; then some one put a handkerchief over the face. That roused some instinct in me. Involuntarily I found myself kneeling beside the body, acting, speaking : “ How long has he been in the water ? ” No one answered—perhaps no one knew, but the water was forming

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shallow pools round the khaki uniform, and it was very wet.

“Get a covering of some sort,” I demanded, “and an ambulance, and help me work his arms.”

I took hold of the arm nearest to me, and commenced to do first aid—and then nearly dropped it, for it had the red cross badge neatly sewn above the elbow. Up till then, no one had lifted the handkerchief from the poor swollen face. No one liked the task . . . but now I felt compelled to.

It was the Red Cross man.

Poor distorted face, livid with lifelessness! No wonder I had not recognized it, in one fleeting glance.

My efforts were redoubled. He belonged to us. He must live. Why should his life be cut off, right at the commencement of our usefulness? This would not do at all.

How we worked! The wharf watchman brought a mattress and a blanket from his hut, and they stripped the wet clothes and waterlogged boots off between them, and chafed the clammy limbs, and forced brandy between the clenched teeth. Some one looked after his tongue too, and pounded on his chest. . . . Still no signs of life. No breath from the compressed and expanded lungs. No heart beats in that still breast.

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“ ’Tain’t no use,” said a sailor dully. “ There ain’t no breff lef in ’im. ’E’s dead.”

“ Go on trying ! ”

“ ’Tain’t no use.”

Nevertheless, they went on trying, and then, when I suddenly pounced upon the waistcoat pocket and found the watch which had only stopped an hour before, and showed it them, they got heartened.

And then ? Then—

“ ’E sighed ! ” shouted the man at the helm. We all gazed, but continued to work, though nothing further happened, for fully five minutes. Then he sighed again,—and so it continued, till little sighing breaths, came in little irregular gaps—then more, in regular time, then at last, a full deep intake, and a splutter.

“ Thank God ! ” I muttered. The flesh grew warmer now, and the faintest tinge of colour illuminated the white cheeks. But he stopped breathing again, which brought, almost despairing they were so frantic, renewed efforts. These were rewarded in time, for quite suddenly, every time the arms were moved, there was a groan, which presently relapsed into gentle respirations. The Red Cross man lived—we all felt it, but he did not become conscious. I lifted his eyelid and found his pupils staring. What was wrong ?

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Some one said, "Look at the blood on your dress ! And on you ! and you !"

It was true. We were all splashed and marked with blood. It was horrid.

"It's 'is 'ead !"

So it was. The poor fellow must have struck a beam of some sort as he fell, and up till now suspended animation had stopped the flow of blood.

"Oh, for a needle !" I exclaimed, for it was extreme.

"I've got a needle !" answered a sailor, whipping out a housewif, "likewise flaxen thread."

I don't know how he knew that flaxen thread would answer the purpose, or how I knew—but it did.

"Here comes the ambulance !"

Only a young pair of orderlies were with it. However, they were splendid in their efforts. They lifted the body on to the stretcher, and tied up the wound, but it was no use, it soaked and soaked :

"Come !" I said, seizing the needle. "It's no use hesitating in a case like this !" And shoving the poor head on one side stitched the scalp with the flaxen thread, whilst behind me ensued this conversation :

*Orderly* : "Who is it ?"

*Sailor* : "One o' your lot. There's 'is duds."

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*Orderly* : " What was he doing down here ? "

*Sailor* : " Don't know. Must 'ave got drunk last night and wandered down when 'e woke this morning. 'E didn't fall in till five past ten. There's 'is watch ! "

*Orderly* : " Who fished 'him out ? "

*Sailor* : " We did. 'Appened to come over from the ship, 'Ercules there, on picket. 'Appened to be quite useful for onst."

No more was said. That's the Senior service all over—isn't it ? " Done our bit, 'appened to be quite useful for onst." How dear and simple and modest they are, bless their hearts. One could not do enough for them—sailors, or soldier men, either.

Well, that's all, except one little incident. As the sailor put away that useful commodity, the housewif, he said : " Excuse me, miss—I don't know whether you belongs to us—if you comes fr' the old country out there, or not—but I'd like to shake 'ands with you. You reminds me of my mother."

He was an old man, and I'm only twenty-seven ! And so nearly half asleep that I feel seven.

So good-bye for this week my one and only sister.

Your R. X NURSE.

LETTER VIII

*March 12th.*

SUNDAY night again—and rather a weary week in between with no excitements. The strange Hospital, nurses, doctors, and orderlies bewilder me. I have no place here, and make no friends. I hope to go back to my own unit shortly. Really I have got quite fond of them all, Criss-Cross and Fluff and Stock and Shack—to say nothing of the men. Talking of the men, after my last letter you will wonder about the Red Cross man! I have not heard. Fluff just mentioned that he had had an accident! “Fell in the water somewhere,” she said, “but was fixed up all right and was doing well.” I said nothing, like the “Tar baby”! but indeed I wanted very much to know. None of our own men have come my way to ask, and I suppose no one else cares here where there are so many wounded, and sick, and in misery.

But the Red Cross man! How did he get in the

## LETTERS

water ? Is he a saint, or a sinner—or both ! I am inclined to think he is both. But whether he is a saint, or a sinner, always after this it will seem as if he belonged to me. He won't know. No one will know, but I shall remember that distorted, agonized, livid face until my dying day ; and then the light dawning on it—Yes, it was like the dawn, rosy light seemed to creep into the face, from pallid night—the difficult breathing, and then the groans, growing easier and easier. I *feel* like a mother ! I shall look at the back of his head and feel guilty if it does not heal, and proud if it does. Proud too when he walks jauntily and works well. At any rate the wound ought to be clean since it was so well douched with saline solution.

YOUR RED X NURSE.

*March 14th.*

P.S. Our detachment has been ordered forward. Hurrah ! I join them to-morrow.



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### LETTER IX

*March 24th.*

WE were delayed starting for some days, which was hard to bear, for we had only our kit in which we stood to go on with, and a change in our bags. Some felt it more than others. Fluff most of all, and Shack least, because of her Colonial training—but it told all the time during our journey, for we had to use our things before we left, so that towels that we had prepared for the train were not fresh when we started, and so on ; until, when we arrived we were reduced to filth in almost every department ; even the food we ate was grubby, and the cold at night ! Never shall I forget it.

Criss-Cross was magnificent. Or does she not feel ? She never complained at all.

I must say that I know now that the Black man spoke very truly when he said, " Campaigning was not the job for women," and that they were a " beastly nuisance." I overheard this, and I heard the Red Cross man answering—

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“ Ah, but think of the comfort that they will be to the sick, sir—and they are very good after all.”

Pride has kept me good thenceforward. I refuse to be discussed as a “ beastly nuisance ” by any man—would you not ? Fluff says she does not mind in the least, for “ women are not made to suffer,” which is such an unusual verdict, that there is no contradicting her. Stock and Shack do not seem to mind so long as we all suffer together. What they cannot bear is what they call “ injustice ” and “ unfairness.” So long as they consider the best possible arrangements are being made for us they are silent ; but if any one else has anything better, there is an uproar. They demand that they should be “ treated like ladies,” by which they mean, treated as if they were Generals’ wives in a retreat—which is quite impossible. The Bloodless One fosters this extraordinary condition of mind. “ In my last campaign we were allotted reserved carriages,” “ Special servants were put on to wait on us,” “ The orderlies brought us foot warmers, and cakes of chocolate,” “ The officers always provided us with books and papers,” “ There was boiling water to make tea whenever you called for it, and as for being cold, no gentleman would dream of allowing it ! ” She drones me to sleep with these vivid pictures of her imagination, and I dream in my

## OF A V.A.D.

freezing, uncomfortable corner, as the train rattles forward, that she is being tucked into a sleeping berth warmed with hot-water bottles by the Colonel himself, while the Black man coaxes her with rather vapid novels, and the Mouse feeds her with biscuits and chocolates which he badly wants himself.

\* \* \* \* \*

“Whatsoever I can desire or imagine for my comfort I look for it not here, but hereafter. For if I might alone have all the comforts of the world—it is certain that they could not long endure. Wherefore, O my soul, thou canst not be fully comforted, nor have perfect refreshment except in God.”

\* \* \* \* \*

These words seemed borne on my inner consciousness as I woke, for I must have slept for hours; and there was the Red Cross man standing at the carriage door in the chilly dawn, apologetically holding a billy can full of steaming cocoa and saying, “Morning, Nurse. Would your people like a drink of cocoa? it’s all the hot stuff procurable—and have you got your own cups and food? I’ll try and get eggs and bread at a place we are coming to, but food seems very scarce here. We ought to be there by this time to-morrow morning.”

\* \* \* \* \*

In this way we got along; and at last we arrived.

## LETTERS

It was cold, and frosty, and clear, in the early early morning, when the train rattled into the station at the terminus, and we stood on the platform, having reached our destination. The Red Cross man passed me, and said something—I quite forget what, but it gave me the feeling, which I can only describe, as being lifted between heaven and earth. The sun was rising over some far distant hills ; the sky was mauve and grey and blue ; the air translucent ; and our hearts thrilled for the first time to the sound of guns booming far away in the star-dim west.

I was dreaming there on the station platform when the One-without-blood shook me up. She said, “ I cannot think why they chose such an unpractical person for a nurse, for my unit ! Come, bring your bag and get into the waggon ! ”

This all happened yesterday morning and now we are resting and are to go on duty this afternoon, and take over from a Colonial detachment, who have had a good innings, and are going down to the Base for a rest and change. They had a very big battle up here a short time ago, and every one is exhausted. Our train will take them back, also our letters, and a number of the sick. So is our life “ at the Front ” really going to begin.

We have arrived.

Your R. X NURSE.

LETTER X

*March 26th.*

O H, that you were here! You would love it. It's It—and besides you would be here! How selfish I am; but the heart is weak and nobody loves me now—except the men.

And I like them, and must not like them. Heigh Ho!

The camp is a huge mass of tents: and the main Hospital is another warren of planks. It is to be taken over entirely by us to-morrow—the present staff retreating to the Base. Meanwhile we “double.” I mean in every case we double up with our prototype. Mine is a Colonial nurse, who speaks with a nasal accent. She says she is very tired; and no one has thanked her for what she has done: and she “has had about enough of it”; and she objects to nursing “natives”; and the “English orderlies are quite unbearable”; and she is jolly glad she is going down again, for there will be some one to speak to at the Base, and some one

## LETTERS

to take her out—that is what she feels most bitterly, “not having a bit of fun,” up here.

Ah, well—such is life, and she is young. The Colonial nurses that I have seen are most remarkably young. Under twenty-three some of them. How on earth did they get time to train? For they are trained. A.T.N.A. is on their badges, which is a blue enamel Maltese Cross with the Southern Cross starred upon it.

If it's nothing but “work, work,” as she says, then I shall be happy, for work is worship in my philosophy—especially since Tom my brother, and his friend Philip, whom I had promised to marry (you recollect?) were killed side by side in France.

I had thought the world had stopped for me then. But God guided me to that Hospital at home, and so to religion, the greatest of all interests. So that now I do not forget exactly; but live, and work, and am happy.

*April 3rd.*

They are indeed a very obstreperous lot of orderlies, and they are so precious: they can always return to their regiments if they choose; and as these are good at their work, and so hard to replace if they leave, they know their value well. It will be quite impossible ever to make anything out of

## OF A V.A.D.

them—at least it looks like that just now. They came up a little while before us and there is no chance of our getting rid of them. As the Bloodless One says, we shall “have to put up with them”; but it will take a lot of putting up with! Thank goodness, we have the Red Cross man, and at least I shall be protected, since I am under his wing, namely in the Out-patient and Casualty Department. We are to take turns about for night work, but I come last on the list for that, since I had three weeks of it at the Base.

Poor Fluff came into the Casualty this morning and wept; before the Red Cross man too! He was creeping away, but she waved for him to stop, and though we were very busy we had to listen to her, and shut the patients out, *pro tem*. It was the head orderly of all who had humiliated her, and she can get absolutely no redress, for she has been to the Colonel, who said: “My dear girl, you must not make complaints to me. It’s quite impossible to cope with them. Do your best: do your best, and pray pretend you have not seen me at all.”

It seems she offended the Staff Sergeant, by not using some unsterile dressing he handed her—and so word went round the orderlies to do their best to embarrass her. You perhaps know how unbearable they can be. Poor Fluff! I almost added my

## LETTERS

tears to hers, so deep was my sympathy. The tea they brought her was beastly ; the medicine glasses dirty ; thermometers lost ; Reports ridiculous ; calls unfounded, and so on—all, all carried out with that ingenuous innocence that only orderlies know how to put on. At last at 2 a.m., when she sat down for a moment behind her screen, came a tap, which she instantly answered, and a deep sigh greeted her. “ Oh, I am glad I have wakened you at *last*, Sister ! For ten minutes as ever is, have I stood and called you, for No. 7 A<sup>B</sup>'s pulse has gone to pieces, like as if he was going to die sudden : and A<sup>B</sup> orderly was in a terrible way about him when he called me, to call you Sister.”

Poor Fluff ! She told us No. 7 A<sup>B</sup> was fast asleep, with a pulse like a lamb, when she reached him, and the orderly there said he *had* had an attack, and that as Fluff was so long in coming he had administered restoratives, and that then the patient had gone to sleep ; and he declared that it all happened half an hour before she came ; making out that she had been neglecting her duty. And she knew that every one of them would prove in unison that it was so, if she dared report the matter. This was bad enough, but things became unspeakable towards morning when the Black man went his rounds, for they made her eat the earth before him,



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by not having reported properly to her previously.

This sort of thing in A<sup>B</sup>, at the bed of No. 7 :  
“ Has he had a good night, Sister ? ” “ No, he had an attack about 2 a.m., but he was given his restorative, and soon recovered.”

A strange look of bewilderment passed over the face of No. 7, but he said nothing. Then the Sergeant's voice :

“ Please, sir. Report for the night, sir—Case No. 7. Slept all night, sir ; temperature normal, pulse normal.”

“ But,” stammered Fluff, “ I came here at 2 a.m. myself and——”

“ Well ? ” inquired Major Black stiffly.

“ They said he had had an attack,” burst forth poor Fluff. And then she became aware that the ward was suffering from suppressed mirth.

But it was worst of all when the Medical Officer had departed. A<sup>B</sup> was the last ward to be inspected ; and Fluff trying to screw up her courage to speak to the Sergeant, as he handed over the diet papers, and quite aware of the now almost open hilarity of the ward, held out her hand for them (it was her business in turn to hand them over to the Head Sister before giving up for the night), for the Sergeant dropped them on the floor, and wheeling went out of the room.

## LETTERS

"Pick that up!" ordered Fluff. How she wished, too late, that she had not spoken! She went out after the Sergeant, and ordered him again to do her bidding, but clapping his hand over his mouth he jerked his thumb at the junior orderly, who marched into the ward, stuffing his handkerchief into his. Then it was that the ward burst into floods of open hilarious laughter, and Fluff had fled, leaving the diet sheets behind her, to the Major.

We got rid of her somehow, and proceeded with our dressings. I was exceeding wroth, and the Red Cross man was silent. Was this how we were to be treated? Was there no redress?

I should like to tell you now a little more about the looks of the Red Cross man. He is exceedingly well made and must be about forty, but has not lost any of the elasticity of youth. He is very deft, and strong, and quick and inordinately lean. I cannot place him in any profession—nor art—nor craft. What he has been remains a mystery. He has a lined, kind, strong face and a delightful voice which sometimes speaks English with a kind of swagger. You would think then that he was putting on "side" if he gave you any other cause to imagine such a thing, but he does not. He always appears humble and amused in a vague

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kind of way, and yet he is the most serious person I have ever met in my life ; and he never wears anything but ammunition boots on his feet. This I *could not* do, and of course his ordinary khaki uniform without any shirt visible underneath, makes him look like anything but a man of our own class. Still his Oxford accent ! And then, on the contrary, he can speak quite common English, as to the manner born, and does at times :—also Irish, or even Scotch, each accent seeming to change as he addresses different individuals. Indeed, I heard him drawl to an Australian one day, “ Better squat, chum—hitch on to this—while your thumb is lanced.”

The [Australians love him. By the by, I will tell you more about them another week ; now I want to tell you the climax of this story of Fluff's.

It was half-past five that evening that I went round to the back of our tent to cut across to “ Quarters,” and there I ran into a mob.

“ Here, miss ! ” whispered a huge son of New Zealand, grabbing my elbow. “ Out of it ! ”

It was no use trying to be dignified, so I laughed and said, “ What's up ? ”

“ Only,” he said slowly and very unctuously, each long round syllable delighting my ear, “ th' Red Cross man givin' the Sergeant of them orderlies

## LETTERS

the grandest dance of his life ! He hasn't hit him yet—but he's got him goin' in the ring, round and round ; though the Sergeant is trembling and perspiring he keeps goin' like a tired 'roo " (I wish I could tell you how he expressed round). " I wonder if he's going to hit him ! Bet the Sergeant wonders too ! That Red Cross man o' yours is a champion ! I'm afraid he is a trained middle weight boxer—and the Sergeant's afraid of it too."

LETTER XI

*April 3rd.*

THE Red Cross man becomes odder and odder. I cannot make him out at all.

The morning after he made "the Sergeant dance" (I never heard the sequel, but the orderlies are quite good now) I wondered if I should ask him about it, then I decided not: then a sudden impulse made me blurt out these words:

"Those stitches in the back of your head! Do you know how you got them?"

He turned slowly round and looked at me. I can see his face now, grey lined and horror-stricken as it had been before when he lay in the sunshine on the wharf, sodden with the sea. Did he know that I knew? Was this reproach? Had he not wanted to live? I felt afraid—and then a terrible inclination to laugh came over me, to break the spell somehow, but he spoke in time to prevent it.

"I fell in the sea," he said mechanically, "punc-

## LETTERS

turing that hole in my head as I fell. I should have been lost, but God in His mercy did not allow that. I was in sin."

Words cannot convey the emotion that was communicated to me over these mysterious words. Lost? Are we not all lost in a sense when we die? In sin! Are we not all in sin?

But I could not speak further. There is a barrier, as you well know, set between the subordinates and the Nursing Staff—and of necessity this is so. The barrier must never come down—but words float over it at times—actions, thoughts. So always this man must remain inexplicable! Yet the mystery of his personality will continue to interest me so enormously. I cannot help that. Is he a saint? Is he a sinner? Surely the former. He is so kind, so understanding, so tender with the sick. Yet he never falters in his dealings with them, his hand is always steady, he is cruel to be kind, he never flinches, never frowns, and never smiles except at the right moment. Always he is upright and truthful and straightforward, and to us he scarcely speaks except in those wonderful asides of his. Yet if he were a saint would the Australians love him? They are so odd, these great lank men from the land of gold, so touchy, so irreligious, so terribly independent in theory. But

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are they, perhaps, like babes grown into men? Is it because he treats them as if he had "become as a little child"? I believe that is the whole philosophy of the Australians—simplicity. They cannot bear the Mouse, for instance. "He isn't a *man*," I overheard one say. "He's got scent on. Gee wif! I'd raver die in me bunk than be cut up by him! Those long white fingers of his! And pink nails—and his stare!" The Mouse has a way of looking at you, with a concentrated gaze in his very pale eyes.

But to return to our subject, him whom the Australians love. How does he appeal so tremendously to their manhood? Is it because he can fight or——? But I give it up. I think he must have sinned, and be doing penance by being here in this capacity—but I do not know.

Now I must tell you about Casualty. We have surgical work to do galore; wounds, dressings and emergency operations. Things are done here in Casualty that would surprise our Big Surgeon at home. The Red Cross man has so won the confidence of the Colonel that he is allowed to act very much on his own account. He sees all the out-patients, and weeds out the worst cases. The others we attend to alone from 6 a.m. till 10 a.m., when the Black man sits in State till mid-day. Then the

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Colonel attends for one hour. Later we go into the operating theatre for a couple of hours, and later again I go to my ward, and see that the patients have been comfortable all day, and are fixed up for the night.

We certainly are very busy, but I conceive that that business makes us all very contented. For we all just now seem to be unusually happy. "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!"

We are nearer to the Front than any other big Hospital, but, as we are pushing the enemy back here, step by step, it is possible that they will run up another place further forward.

\* \* \* \* \*

We come on duty at 6 a.m., have coffee and start to work. Then do the orderlies start daily to break our hearts. They either will not clean at all, or they clean so vigorously that they "sweep us off our feet." The Red Cross man goes quietly on. Patient after patient comes quietly in—and as quietly goes out again, stitched, and dressed, and bandaged. Old patients first, who sleep in a Hospital Tent and "do for themselves," i.e., whose only duty is to nurse themselves and be in time for dressings. These are the ones who have only to be patched up to go on duty again. So sad



## OF A V.A.D.

they look, poor boys, so bored, so tired, and so white. My heart goes out to them. Do they *want* to be 'mended' and go back? *They* would all say "Yus"; yet it must be so awful in the trenches, though they never complain, just as they never seem to laugh, or talk much. They are woefully silent. Thank goodness a Y.M.C.A. hut is coming soon, they need a little recreation so much. Not only these, but all the men. There is a Garrison Church tent to which they are paraded on Sunday mornings, and on Sunday evening there is Evensong, to which many roll up, and sing the three hymns heavily; but that and the canteen seem to be the only places of relaxation from the words, "At War."

At nine we have our breakfast of cocoa, bread and butter and "something with it," then back to work. At ten new patients come in. Marched up to the tent by a Sergeant, they "dismiss," to sink in weary anxious groups, waiting their turn.

1st. A cut hand. "You can do that, Sister. It only needs a couple of horsehair catches. Next!"

Out of the tail of my eye I see 2. A pale-faced Tommy, carried in and placed on the table. A glance at him and then at the paper in his hand. "No. 25 A tent, Isolation," says the Red Cross man. He is carried out.

"Next!"

## LETTERS

3. A wound broken down, Readmission. 4. Another cut. 5. A bad burn. 6. An enormous boil ; one after another they come in. Some have to wait to see the doctor. These are mostly medical cases, for no battle has been fought for at least a week, and no drafts of wounded men have yet come to hand. We came just at the right time to get our bearings in a lull of work.

The Bloodless One pays her visits with her orderly, a cheeky little Cockney, who smiles behind his hand when she is rude to me. The Red Cross man stands to attention, I take a deep breath, and "bear up," knowing all will be wrong. Never mind ! The Red Cross man will whisper an aside. I shall listen for it, but not so much as an eyelash shall show that I have heard. "My son, take it not grievously if some think ill of thee, and speak that which thou wouldst not willingly hear."

Then the dear nice Colonel comes in and the sun shines. All the grey cloud seems to have disappeared, he beams beneficently on all and sundry—and takes us in turns for drives on Sundays.

Now, little sister mine, you have my record of the day's work. Would that I could picture it more plainly. The tents—did I explain that "Casualty" and "Out-patient" are two large huts or barns with tents adjacent and that we sleep

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under canvas? All over the place these tents stretch out on three sides of us. The house is to the rear, the big plank Hospital is in front in which are most of the wards and the operating rooms, and the hills and firing and fighting are in the far dim distance. But to you in the farthest distance—goes my heart and this.

Your R. X NURSE.

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### LETTER XII

*April 10th.*

**H**AVE I told you that the whole of the Outfit, the Hospital, with all it includes—the Staff and the sick, etc., have been “planted” on the estate of a local nobleman? We are in the Park, and the house is used by the Staff for quarters and offices. The Bloodless One also lives up there—and the orderlies camp in the stable. I have never been into the house, but I hope to go some day. However, the garden, though it is from necessity now rather neglected, is a great delight to me when I can get away into it. There is a shrubbery where spring flowers abound, and in this is built a dear little shrine to Our Lady, with a tiny roof, a stone back built into a rockery, and a statue of her, with the Child. (You say in your letter that Catholics always separate the Mother and Child—but this I have not noticed so far in my journeyings in these countries which are Catholic.) Mosses,

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little ferns and creepers are beginning to uncurl themselves after their winter sleep, "taking no care" of the War within hearing, and at the foot of it all, bubbles a little clear brook of the sweetest water.

Here am I at present writing to you with the trees rustling overhead, the bluest of skies shining above them, and the kindest of breezes blowing through my hair and about the paper. It's so warm, too, and nice, although it is April. The birds are very fine in this country—and there are just at present brilliant parakeets [chattering in a maze of wild cherry trees in full blossom to my right. The place abounds in cherry trees, and if I interpret aright, the shrine is called "To Our Lady of the Cherry Blossoms." That makes me dream—— But I want to tell you first of a little incident that happened last week when we had a great storm—who would guess it now in the sunshine and sweetness of this blessed air?

How distinctly people feel "thought," do they not? It is that which causes intuition, I suppose. Nurses develop the power of intuition so quickly, and patients do it too. I have noticed that the most obtuse patient becomes intuitive when he becomes weak, and even semi-unconscious. That is why I like Criss-Cross, her thought is powerful, and good. She can do what she likes behind my back—

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or to my face for that matter—to lessen my happiness and freedom, for she does it because she honestly disapproves of me, of my outlook on life, my principles, my methods, but she does not *think* evilly. If I do not succeed in my undertakings she grimly says it serves me right, and leaves me alone to recover ;—but the Bloodless One——

Poor Criss-Cross—she is stiff and stern, and cold, and very often cross and disagreeable, but the “thoughts behind” shine forth, and she is really loved by the Tommies. I discovered her true character only the other day ; now I am lost in admiration of her, though she still treats me with the utmost scorn.

It was a windy, horrible gruesome night—the sort of night when people die ; and you shiver all the time at the draughts, at fluttering lights, and strange noises. Just before I went off duty an enteric had died in my ward, my final duty had been to lay him out, and send him to the mortuary : and there was another with pneumonia as well, whom the Principal Medical Officer said, had not a chance. I had occasion to go back to the ward where Criss-Cross was, just before I turned in. I had no lantern, and the wind and rain beat with such fury that she did not hear me. Daring not to venture into the ward when she was on duty, I hesitated on the

## OF A V.A.D.

doorstep. But her back was half turned to me, and she was wholly occupied with the bad case, and never discovered me at all. I took care that she did not, for she was breaking rules—Criss-Cross, bless you! sitting on Tommy's bed "smoothing his troubled brow."

The ward full of men was apparently unconcerned—each form lay recumbent under neatly folded red blankets, and in the dim light you could just see the smooth heads on the white pillows. Gradually I saw more, however. Each owner of each face was wide awake, they were alert, uncomfortable, waiting for something. It came. The wind had ceased to howl momentarily, the rain to beat, but the sick Tommy had lifted up his voice, and bellowed forth the most awful, the most astonishing, the most vile and malignant abuse it is possible to imagine, straight into the face of poor Criss-Cross. He had "got 'em bad," and that is what had upset the ward. It had apparently been going on for some time, and one imagined it would continue for most of the night; perhaps till 2 a.m., when most likely poor Tommy would be carried forth to that other room, where all is still—to lie beside his brother. But meanwhile why was Criss-Cross bearing it? Where were the orderlies?

Gradually it dawned on me. The orderlies had

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been sent away by the Sister because they had no moral control of the man. They had probably been irritating him into paroxysms of rage. If he got up he would die, that was certain, so Criss-Cross was holding him down by "thoughts" of moral suasion. Good Criss-Cross, noble woman, breaking rules to try and save another's life; risking her own, in more ways than one; giving herself out with all her moral force, to reach this other soul. It was cold by Tommy's bed, it was stuffy, it was vile. She was very uncomfortable, perhaps she was fighting sleep, which attacks one unawares in the dark and chill. She was certainly at grips with demons, for the light flickered full on Tommy's white face, and it was evil.

"I'll kill you!" he screamed, gibbering. And then the wind howled again, and the rain beat on the roof and deadened sound; and Criss-Cross took both his hands in hers.

The wind died down again.

—"Help me find my pistol—you ——. Here, it's under the bed. Help me get it—help—help—YOU!! Help me get it. It's for you. A bullet! for you. Oh! you —— Let me get up! Let go my hands! Can't you answer?" . . .

The wind and the rain then, and a sudden silence, and Tommy—Tommy was silent too, an awful



## OF A V.A.D.

blood-curdling stillness held him. I could see he was tense, ready to spring, and I was ready too to help Criss-Cross, only she did not know this. She sat steadily on, in her white dress, her red cape glowing in the fitful light, her white cap flowing round her shoulders, a steady mighty pillar of a woman, yet so frail—so gentle—so silent.

Another word came from Tommy, like an explosive bullet.

“ You —— ”

He grew tenser, his sharp features more rigid, his eyes more vindictive—“ YOU—— ”

“ Oh ! you *ruddy* GOOSE ! ”

Like a wild little clap on a bell Criss-Cross laughed. Her laughter rang out through the whole ward, for the elements still held their peace : and the patients tittered. You know what it is like when a ward laughs.

Tommy took it up. He smiled first ; then he gurgled.

Sister relaxed her hold of him and stood on her feet. He was not laughing in dementia now, but with weak little hollow uncontrolled giggles.

“ Oh, wipe me eyes ! ” he whispered. “ I didn’t mean to call you that. But your white things, and the red ! I thought of ’ome and the ducks, and the pond. I killed a goose for them last year come

## LETTERS

Michaelmas! . . . I won't call you no names again. . . . Could you put me to sleep . . . I'm so tired."

While Criss-Cross reached for the feeder I crept away.

Yes, it was a crisis. We found Tommy's temperature normal in the morning, though he was, of course, most woefully weak. And he has done well. He is down "for home" on the next troop train that takes its departure.

And Criss-Cross has not said a word.

Will this letter show you all my thoughts for you behind the words? Yes, I think it will. No need to protest to you how much I love you, and miss you, and want you every day; for the more the others don't want me, so much the more do I want you.

Yours always,

R. X.

OF A V.A.D.

LETTER XIII

*April 17th.*

**T**HERE is a mail to go and this is Sunday. But I am much too busy to do anything but scratch a few words on the paper.

There was a battle last week and patients have come pouring in—and then instead of getting any help we are one short, for the Bloodless One has gone forward. It is simply a whirl of work, then sleeping like the dead for as many hours as you can get. How lovely it is to be as tired as this when it is “God’s work.”

Good-bye.

Always your R. X NURSE.

P.S. I have just found this which I wrote one night when I could not sleep for thinking of ‘Umpy ‘Erbert, as he is called by the Australians. I refer to the Cockney orderly who has been drafted down to our department. No words can express how

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exasperating and intolerable I have found him heretofore, but "there is so much good in the worst of us" that I am enclosing it to show you how mistaken one can be. Not that 'Erbert is inefficient, or ungentle to the patients ever, but he has always been so impertinent to me. You cannot report a grin, a sigh, or a contemptuous look; but I was waiting. However, when I had the chance I did not, as you shall see; and he has been my devoted slave ever since.

R. X.

*April 15th.*

This evening it was the Cockney orderly who came to the theatre to help me clean up for the day, and leave the place in readiness for the morrow as we always do; and he was drunk! So that to-night I saw him in his true colours, and now I like him. He staggered in about 6 o'clock, and reeled straight over to the operating table, which he embraced lovingly, sorting the blankets into lumps, and talking thus to them:

"Me lil'le moke! Me dear lil'le moke, ain't it a bloomin' shame? Git up there, and over wiv it: or 'we won't git 'ome till mornin'.'" He went on singing "We won't git 'ome till mornin'" till his eye caught the gleam of the big glaring light

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reflected on the fat side of the irrigating can, which was still, after use, swinging low down on its chain, and rather near to his head.

“ ‘Ello ! Dais ! ” he said delightedly ; “ give us a kiss, ducks ! ” And he playfully smacked what he fondly imagined was a cheek, as they do to their pals of the weaker sex in the slums. (What strange ghost face did the poor little fellow see gleaming out of that white irrigating can ?) It swung away easily, and he did not notice its return ; but his face was comical to behold as he turned back to the operating table. “ Blame me ! Go on ! ” he ejaculated bitterly. “ Every one do, from L'-wel'-lalone’, ” (that is what they call the Colonel, a play on his character and his name Llewellyn), “ t’ the dust-bin bloke ; I knew you wouldn’t ’ave no larks—I only tried it on, ’cos I’ve got the ’ump. The bloomin’ blasted ’ump, that’s wot I got ! It’s me biby’s birfday, an’ I’ve been a wettin’ over her lil’le bloomin’ eye, an’ if they finds it out I’ll get the choke. But yer faver doesn’t mind goin’ ter choky for ’is lil’le biby. Pore lil’le mite ! ”

Here he lifted the pillow tenderly in his arms and began crooning to it ; “ ‘Ow’s yer lil’le self, an’ yer faver away fightin’ them Boches, ’e don’t forget yer, faver don’t.”

At this point I thought fit to face up, and accuse

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the orderly. But I must tell you first, that during this maudling conversation, with the inanimate objects of the room, I had been very deep in cogitation as I went on hurriedly—but thoroughly I hope—cleaning up the theatre for both. The first thought that struck me, was to run away.

Why does an educated woman always feel afraid of a drunken man? They are so very helpless when they come to the largiloquent stage! The second thought, Where could I run to? Every one was awfully busy, for it was after the battle, and our Head had departed—not that I should have gone to her in any case—and the Red Cross man was off duty for the first time for days. The Colonel I put on one side, remembering his words to Fluff, and his “Let well alone” ways—so do we learn discretion from others—and the medical staff had followed their work to the wards. Of course, they might return at any minute—I hoped they would, but on the other hand they might not. The third thought was, how on earth had the orderly got past his superiors and come on duty in such a state? He must, of course, have some strong drink hidden about his person and taken more just before entering the theatre, which was still heavy with the fumes of ether, chloroform, and disinfectants. This would make him worse.

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"You are drunk," I said sternly, making this very ancient remark with the keen sense of originality with which it is always uttered by outraged propriety.

"Give me 'arf a charnst!" he entreated. "Gawd! Me'drunk. Wot wif, I arsk? 'Ow 'ave I 'ad 'arf the charnst of a blinkin' bust, and me in 'is Majesty's bloomin' R.A.M.C., with its ' 'Erbert come 'ere'; and ' 'Erbert go there'; and ' 'ere y' are 'Erb, wipe 'is bloomin' faice,' from one, an' 'taike orf 'is boots,' from another; an' ' 'urry up abaht it,' from a third? Orficers! It's all orficers in the R.A.M.C.; an' when it isn't orficers, it's Sisters. 'O, 'Erb, 'e's bein' sick!' fr' one; and ' 'old the tray so,' fr' another, all shouting, at onst, an' that when yer knees is givin' under yer, an' yer eyes is watering 'orrible, an' yer all of a tremble, an' wants t' fall on a 'eap on the floor cos they 'appen to be letting the blood outter yer bloomin' mate." (Poor 'Erb, so that was it, was it! That and his baby's "birfday." I remembered to have seen him about a good deal with another orderly who had been operated on by special arrangement from necessity, just before our little man had gone off duty).

The light glaring on his face showed him to me in all his wretchedness, remorselessly outlining the

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dark rings round his light eyes, his weak white features, his small mouth, his freckles, and closely cropped red hair with the white skin showing through. The "mother" feeling flooded me. I flung open the window and turned on the tap. "Put your head under that Herbert," I advised, and this he staggered over and did.

"Now," I said, "clean up the floor." But he was quite incapable of doing anything of the kind. He continued, however, to speak, but now to me: "Thank yer, lady," he said, sitting on a bucket which he took great pains to turn upside down. (I seized and emptied it just in time, for it had been filled with gore and swabs, and he began by spilling its contents.) "You've believ' m' word, an' I won't forget it. I'm n' drunk, an' I'm a goo' mate, an' a goo' orderly. I learnt at the Middlesex 'Orspitle berfor I took ter th' barrer, an' wilks; but if you was to sai as 'ow I was drunk, I'd get sent back to the Line, an' I'm not taking any, for I don't like killin' blokes—no, not even Boches. They done me no 'arm, but I'll fight fer me bi'by and me girl. An' I only gits a bob a day; over against a barrer o' wilks worth all the tea in China. I gotter a quid a day often as not outter that. Tommies ain't like orficers an' them, they—them generals—gotter chanst a' maiking a' 'undred



## OF A V.A.D.

thousand quid f' doin' the saime as us men. For goin' out an' doing 'is bit an' 'is dooty, that there general wif a girl's name now, 'll get a 'undred thousand quid, and a hearl's belt, and a blue stocking and a garter complete, whilst we—we gets a bob a day and confined to barricks for spendin' it if we gits the chanst. Is that fair, I asks? And I gets no answer to my questing. No, not fr' you even, wot's a lady."

"Look here, orderly!" I broke in, "you must try to pull yourself together! How did you get here in this state, anyway?"

"To you, lady, I tell no lies, straight I don't. I shoved it in my stockin', and there it is still. I tell you 'cos you believes me. Straight I do."

"Give it to me."

"All right!"

What his dazed mind thought I was going to do with the stuff—share it, perhaps—I have no idea, but he pulled a pretty little flask from his stocking top half full of very strong and fumey alcohol, and I sobered him; for I broke the bottle very dramatically in the sink, letting the contents mix a gargle and run away with the lysol. He danced on his toes, and for a moment again I was frightened of him, but his Cockney sense of inevitableness and humour came back to him. "Now you've done

## LETTERS

it," he grinned. "Wot 'a waiste!" Then sheepishly added, "An' jest as well too, I don't think! For I don' want C.B.! An' I won't forget y' trusted me—not 'arf I won't do that."

I had warmed up some strong tea, which the doctors had left standing in a teapot after their usual pick-me-up drink between operations, and gave it him. He delicately took it away to drink in solitude, and by the time we were ready to lock up for the night he had recovered himself sufficiently to go on duty in the wards without drawing undue attention to himself—I hope.

LETTER XIV

*May 1st.*

“CASUALTY” was beyond description for two or three days after the patients began to come in from that battle of Devil’s End. Thank God with them—

“There came a mist and a blinding rain,  
And the world was never the same again.”

—Already it *is*, however, and thank God for that too.

But this sea of pain! this mist of horror! this blinding rain of tears. When I tell you that the orderlies—hard-hearted villains though they may be—dropped about fainting as they helped, it may make you understand a little. Until at last the Red Cross man struck the right note. He quoted Kipling’s “If” to them, and that made them forget themselves. At first, he tried to save me these sights, but it was impossible, and as I explained

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to him, I could lift my spirit above it all ; and if my body collapsed, would he please throw cold water over my head—when he found time. Besides, I have a convenient way of half losing consciousness on these occasions, standing up. I do not fall down ! When I come to, certainly my hands are like wool, my voice is hoarse, my skin dry and parched, and my face feels leaden and streaky, and I have no doubt looks it too. Oh, I cannot explain ! But it is so. Then I hear the voice of the Red Cross man :

“ If you can keep your head when all about you  
Are losing theirs, and blaming it on to you ! ”

Then patiently, he said, “ The ligatures on the top left-hand shelf, orderly ! ”

The orderly being quite incapable of walking, and the Sergeant being tied up, as it were, in what he was doing, I stagger across and get what he wants, keeping my head turned away from that sight on the table. And then wash my hands in cold water, and thus refreshed, come at it again.

“ If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew  
To serve your turn long after they are gone,  
And to hold on when there is nothing in you  
Except the will which says to them ‘ Hold on, ’ ”

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again says the voice. And the orderly smiles at you, and you look back at him, as you help the poor bandaged body that has horrified you so, on to the stretcher for the wards.

Oh! *Thank God* for morphia and chloroform—and the heart of the Red Cross man!

\* \* \* \* \*

I am becoming quite Popish—not that Kipling is, but the ward is filled with French and a number of the Connaught Rangers since the battle of “Devil’s End,” when they came in wounded in their hundreds; and most of these are Catholics, setting great store on their little medals and scapulars and rosaries, which they hang about them; and they are constantly crossing themselves, and saying ejaculatory prayers, which is altogether charming, since it seems to make them bear their pains with merit—nay almost joyfully! Shan (John in English) O’Shaunassy, for instance, is a case in point. He is horribly wounded. I won’t tell you much about that; but his pain was so terrific when they first brought him to Casualty, that a whole grain of morphia made not the least difference to him; and when we took off his tunic—they had not dared do it before, he was so dreadfully damaged, the orderly fainted and I lost consciousness, and,

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when I came to, I was still clinging to a part of his anatomy which I had been told to hold, but was on my feet as usual, so that no one knew that I had lost my wits *pro tem*. The Red Cross man, who always keeps his head, bound him up somehow or another unaided. That was the first day, when one had no time for pity, and case after case came to our table and was "put through"; but of all of them, now, on looking back I am sure that O'Shaunassy suffered the most and was most silent: and he still continues as he began. He bears torments in silence. He has a rosary which he says has been blessed by the Pope, and which is never out of his hands, if he can help it: this seems to aid him.

Well, I asked him to-night, handing it back after he had been deprived of it for his evening wash, why it was so much to him.

"Sure it's like this, Sister," he said; "they've been blessed by the Holy Father himself, and every time you hold on to one of the little beads, and you say a prayer, it will be three hundred days' Indulgence you will be getting!"

Bewildered I tucked the sheet under his chin.

"Indulgence?"

"Forgiveness."

"I did not know that indulgence meant forgive-

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ness, Shan. But how can it give you three hundred days' forgiveness ? ”

“ Could not a man get exemption at all ? If it was the way that his Master let him off it.”

“ But indulgence, forgiveness—for what ? ”

O'Shaunassy turned very surprised eyes to my face.

“ Sure,” he said, “ we all sin, do we not ? Or is it myself you think I will be praying for ? Well, it's not entirely. 'Tis for Pat most days ; and then there's the General ! ”

“ Do you get forgiveness for *their* sins by praying on those little beads, Shan ? ”

“ I hope so, Sister ! For the Holy Father said that each prayer, on each bead, would let you off three hundred days of Purgatory, and why would I not believe him ? But it's ap—*approximately*, you understand. Perhaps the drop of water the rich man wanted off Lazarus was worth more—to him. But we don't know what they want exactly—the souls that have passed. Faith, 'tis Our Lady that would know now—and no one better than Her ; for she spends her life, since she went to Heaven, pleading with her Son to make it easy for other mothers' sons. For 'tis Herself who would know the love of the mothers of them—for their sons. Yes, 'tis the Blessed Mother of Christ who prays

## LETTERS

best for all men born of women, and all women who have borne sons."

I tried to follow this. It seemed feasible enough, though a little complicated, and off the point, so I went back to the main question in my mind :

"That's why you address your prayers to Mary then ! But when this indulgence is gained, what happens ? "

"When a full indulgence is gained, God rest his soul, Pat will go to heaven, and then I hope he will start praying for me—for the prayers of the Holy Souls is thrice blessed indeed ; and I want Pat to get there very soon."

"How does all this help you to bear the pain as you do, Shan ? "

"Faith, does not the pain make the prayer worth so much more ! If you take a trench without a hurt, is it worth as much as if you take it wounded, sore, and staggerin' ? Why that last is worth commendation, and it's commendation you get. Even from the King of England you get that, and from your friends ! 'Well,' they say, 'well, that was worth something,' and they grips hold of the hand of you, and shakes it—hard."

"Yes, that's true, Shan," said I. "The pain certainly makes the prayer worth more."

"It does. Pat now ! 'Twas Pat himself took



## OF A V.A.D.

a trench and died in it ; and when we came up with him he was all torn, and bleeding, and his face was white like the lilies of the Saints, and the eye of him was gleaming like burnt peat, while he stood there yelling his death glory, and brandishing his bayonet. And then—Oh ! Holy Mother of God ! I see him fall all in a heap at my feet, Sister, with the white face of him turned up to heaven, and his lips trembling with torture. ‘ Pat, me boy ! ’ I says, kneeling down in all the tumult. ‘ Pat,’ I says, ‘ what is it ? ’ ‘Tis yourself has something to say, Pat, and ’tis me that’s here beside you.’

“ I put me face close down to his, and he was cold like snow. Pray for me, Shan ! ’ he says. . . . And then, Sister, he came and stood beside me on the stretcher, and followed me . . . he was there beside you when I was on the table in all that trembling agony. . . . ”

O’Shaunassy was greatly moved ; something was on his mind that he wanted to say.

“ Go on,” I urged gently.

“ Well, then, ’twas something he wanted to say to me—that made him keep coming.

“ ‘ Shan,’ he says, ‘ there’s a terrible lot over here, and they wants praying for . . . they wants it as well as me, Shan,’ he says. ‘ But I heard you promise, . . . and don’t you forget it. For it’s

## LETTERS

like this,' he says, 'if you don't fix on me to pray for, Shan, I'm afraid I'll be forgotten, for all the prayers and Masses for the dead they says below are not enough for so many of us poor boys,' he said, 'who have died in sin: and I've got no one else left behind,' he says, 'but only you Shan.'"

Shan put his arm across his eyes, thinking of Pat; and I could not leave him like that.

"So every time you touch a bead, and say a prayer for him, happy Pat gets three hundred days off purgatory? But that is splendid, Shan," I said, "and now you have told me about it, and that is good too. Perhaps you will get a long time off for that, as I am sure you will for bearing your wounds so bravely. Come, Shan, smile!"

"Sure," he said, "it's done me good to tell you—and to hear you. Is there anything else you want to know at all, that I can tell you about the Religion, Sister, for indeed it does me good to speak of it."

"Did you always speak about it, Shan? To outsiders—I mean like this?"

"Glory be to the Saints! Sister, what would I be talking like this for in the trenches and travelling and all? The boys would not like it at all. But it's here lying in the bed I am, and nothing at all to do, but put up with it. And then—then being

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weak and helpless. Well ! who would I turn to but the Holy Mother ? And the more you thinks about it—'tis Holy Church I'm meaning—the more there comes out of it."

" But how lovely, Shan ! You must tell me some more about it : for I thought that your Church made you pay for things, and gave you no comfort at all."

" Pay for things, with money do you mean ? For what, Sister, I would be asking ? Pay for what ? "

" Well, Masses, and indulgences, and dispensations, and things."

" But the nonsense of that ! You give thank-offerings, and those quite willing, for it would be a mean man that would not. And how would the Church be keeping itself up at all if no one gave alms ? 'Tis a very big Church ; and there is no help out of the State for it in old Ireland. And Holy Church is a mother to us all. For what would we not be giving alms then, when we want to keep it ? "

" But they say you have to pay for indulgence," I persisted.

" 'Tis not true at all, for the Holy Father himself gave us the rosaries on the way through, with the indulgence attached, and the blessing from his

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hands. Sure 'twas then we gave our mite if we had a mind to : or we spent it on drink ! The Holy Father did not know at all. But if he knew, 'tis likely he'd give to the boy who gave up his drink for the pence to go to the begger the more blessing than he would give to the fellow who drank it down, and knocked the begger about ! But the Same did not know. He gave to us all alike—a rosary it was, with the indulgence and blessing as well. 'Tis God that knows who uses them right and 'tis Himself who will grant the prayers that's said on them."

" Well now, Shan, just one more question before I go. Why do you not pray to God, instead of saying Hail Marys, and calling on all the Saints ? "

" Now, Sister, would it be me would be bothering with the General, when all the Staff was there for that matter, and nothing else but to wait on his Honour ? "

So I laughed and came away. But, my little sister, is it not wonderful faith of O'Shaunassy's. He lies in the first bed just inside my casualty ward, and I look " for the smile of him " whenever I go in and out of the ward now. Such a wonderful person ! He can never get well, he most probably will not die. He has to endure constant pain, he has nothing to look forward to, for he has no people

## OF A V.A.D.

left at home, yet he can smile and go on saying the prayers to the Holy Mother. . . .

And he is not the only one, for the French seem as patient, as cheerful, and as unselfish, as our British Tommies. Oh ! God will surely bless them all and give them eternal rest for their sufferings here below—surely they—even if they do not know it “naked follow the naked Jesus.”

It's this battle has depressed me ; yet not depressed but lifted my heart to God.

He knows about it all, surely He knows.

Your R. X.

## LETTERS

### LETTER XV

*May 2nd.*

**I** HAD such a wonderful vision of you to-day—  
or rather of you and your Guardian Angel—that I must try and tell you about it, if that is at all possible. I was going to write my letter to you at the “Shrine,”—at least I had gone there with that intention—when the sunshine on the crystal water, the breezelessness of the afternoon, the fragrant sweetness of the air set me dreaming on my moss-covered seat: and then I saw you.

You came into view walking down the pavement of the Court where the flowers are, with your head in the air as you always carry it, and with your small bonnet far back showing your parted, madonna dark hair lying low on either side of your amazingly sweet face. Your lids were down over your eyes; your lips were closed over your white teeth—yet your face was intense beyond measure, as though

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your thoughts were lost in divine contemplation, or in melody far away: indeed your whole slim figure gave this impression of wrapt intensity, enveloped from neck to toe in the long cloak of your calling. Then, behind you, came your Guardian Angel. His expression was like yours, but oh, how unspeakably uplifted, and enthralled. So grand, so calm, so immortally radiant. He walked—yet he did not walk, for his toes were turned downwards so that they only touched ground, if touch ground they did as he came—straight up and down, like a dart with his wings folded backwards and his hands in front holding, straight up and down also, a sword of silver, of honour, and of Fate.

\* \* \* \* \*

Don't ask me what it means, for this vision filled me with amazement and stupefaction: I sat still and stiller, yet the whole afternoon all my life lay before me, all yours as I know it, and our lives in the near past intermingled. A fury of intentions also took possession of me and my brain floating Godward was clear, if you can understand such a thing. What had I done for Him that He should have given me so much—and you? What was His intention between me and thee? Should I have left you? Has any one a right to love anything any more than God? Do I love you more than

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God? Or because of God? Or God because of you?

How does God want to be loved? By pain-suffered cheerfully? By work? By mental suffering? By contentedness and appreciation? By worship? Ah, each soul must find its own way; its way to the Kingdom: its way to God. And it must go alone,—each—soul—must—go—alone.

\* \* \* \* \*

Startled I rose to my feet when the bell rang out from the old tower of the house calling the orderlies for the patients' tea—for I had to go on watch in the ward till the night staff came. And I had not written to you—nor had I come to any conclusion.

Still there are the thoughts that the vision of you brought me at the Shrine.

In the wards all was so different. It was one of those nights when one goes on duty to find all is bustle and confusion. Some patients had just been admitted with fever; they were Australians, and their friends, who were acting as stretcher-bearers, were positively coagentic! I mean they would cling.

"He's my chum, Sister; can't I hear of him every day?"

"No."



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" Well, his mother told me to keep an eye on the bloke. I'll stay."

" You can't stay."

" Why not ? "

" Orders."

" Orders be blowed ! His mother——"

" Is this enteric same as typhoid ? We have that on the Goldfields. I'll nurse him myself if y' can't stop with him. He's my brother. He's a good boy. My mother is the best woman in the world ; it'll break her up if anything happens to Jim. Keep a tight hand on him, Sis, there's a good girl ! "

" Hello, Nurse, d' y' remember me when yon fight was on with the orderlies ? Here's a pal o' mine, Bob. You'll do fine now with her. She's all right. I know her well. Kinder mother to us blokes in the Hospital tent she was. So, Cheer O, Bob."

At last the last of them removed themselves and we tucked up " the boys," as they are called, peacefully. They are almost invariably such nice fellows, and so full of fun ; rather remorseless, difficult-to-follow fun it is, still they are amused and laugh at their own jokes so whole-heartedly that you have to join in. But if you don't humour them they are perfectly unmanageable. They say that at —— they simply shut all the English nurses out of

## LETTERS

the Hospital, as they "bossed" them, i.e. were dictatorial—and this they could not tolerate at all—and "turned to," and "did for themselves"; but here they condescend to like us and to boast that they will salute a nurse with greater alacrity than they will an officer.

All my people have always been Conservatives of the first water who feared God—in the Church of England; and honoured the King—in the Navy or Army, so that I think there must be some odd kink in me, for I seem to understand and be able to sympathize with these sons of the Southern Cross, who pretend they do neither. I love them. They are shy and modest. Yet brave and bold: humble and unpretentious, yet exceedingly complacent and self-opinionated. A most peculiar mixture. The most horrible sin in their eyes is to be uppish, yet they are so magniloquent and pragmatistical as a body that it is absolutely impossible to move them if they make up their minds. They have a terrible method, for instance, of "counting out" anything or any one of whom they disapprove.

This begins in deadly silence and has in it the terror of concentrated mind. On these occasions a simultaneous current of thought seems to circulate through them, so that they begin to act together almost mechanically. At first boredom settles

## OF A V.A.D.

down on them and gloom—the calm before the storm, then a wave of thought stirs the silence into a suppressed excitement which culminates in a single voice which booms out ominously, “One.”

The thought wave and excitement are lost then in an overpowering and awful silence, you could hear a pin drop. It reaches the senses of the offender. He wriggles. And then every Son of the Empire at exactly the same second hammers through the magnetic force with one single simple sound, “Two.” The offender grows smaller ; he loses all sense of ground : this is too tremendous for him, it is as if he was sinking irretrievably in a bog.

“Three.”

It is enough. He is *non est*. No one has ever been known to last out until seven. What would happen if he did ?

“Don’t ask *me* !” says the Australian.

Conversely, as Euclid says, they have a most delightful method of appreciation which they showed to their beloved Anzac General who passed through here the other day ! The troops heard that he would be on the train and collected in groups about the station. No chance of them looking as if they were out to do him honour. I suppose they slouched about and hitched themselves on to fences and posts and pulled their Gurkha hats over their eyes and

## LETTERS

chewed straws and put their thumbs in their belts. At any rate just as their hero stepped from the train, rang out a hundred or more voices in soft musical unison with no prelude at all, no frill or flutter, "He's a dear—old—boy!"

No one could resent this, and if they did it was useless. No one could stop it, you might as well try to stop the flow of a flooded stream. It happened again in another form when he reached camp—and here was no grouping, no visible means of voice, yet the Voice spoke emphatically, endearingly, appreciatively:

"We want—we want—we want You." It was perfectly paced, perfectly sane, perfectly tranquil.

"We want you."

How splendid for the General!

Their humour is not so powerful, though they are amused beyond compare at their own jokes. There is the one about digging a trench, which is exceedingly feeble. Yet it invariably has the effect of sending them into uncontrollable laughter. Some one merely says, "What are you doing heah?" It is enough. Every Australian within reach doubles up!

"But what is the joke?" I asked after one of these wild bursts of joy and chuckles, and Bob explained.

## OF A V.A.D.

"It was one of the dandy British officers, with an eyeglass an' a cane, and the Corporal: who's the son of a lord by rights, but he doesn't speak of it—and 'e can dig. He's a friend of mine. He's in here now with a bad leg. We was digging a trench an' we didn't like doin' it, but we *swot*. We was in a hurry, and down that young officer fella jumps into the midst of us. 'What are you doin' heah?' he says, and nobody knew what to answer him, for nobody knew what he meant! No, not to this day we don't! Whether it was jest encouragement or what. We sat on our picks, glad of a spell though, for a minute and leaves it to Jack——"

"Jack?"

"The Corporal—I told you. The little officer feller then gets very red and twirls 'is cane—and sticks hard on to his eyeglass. 'What are you doing heah?' he says: and Jack still stood watching him with his pick up to attention trying to make it out. Then he concluded that simplicity was the best policy, and he answered. 'We areh diggin' a trench sirh,' and then we all exploded and the little feller did a get-quick-and-lively-out of it and we turned to and swot at it ag'in till it was done. And now that's jest our battle-cry—'What are you doing heah?' We don't know the answer—so we gits at it."

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For myself I like their quieter humour better. That, for instance, of Jack the Corporal, "the son of a lord," who when on our table once—I remembered him when Bob spoke of him—suffering untold agony, gave us a specimen of it. He is extraordinarily good to look at and I believe has been very hard to tame—if tame he is yet. It is a fact in any case that people avoid annoying him, and that his pals adore him. At this time, however, he had been brought low, and the Black man had to torture him without chloroform for some reason. This he bore magnificently, but not in silence. At every screw and twist he whispered in slow, long-drawn-out breaths the most blasphemous language you can imagine—at least you could not—until the Black man said, "I say! Think what you are saying! There's a woman present."

"What if there is? My mother taught me to—(Oh!)—pray, and now when I am repeating my happy childhood's prayers out loud, you grouse—at me! If ever there was need to call on my Maker surely it is at this present time! (Oh . . .) Haven't you finished, man? I can't stand much more of it?"

He turned on me his laughing eyes, dark with pain, and a twisted mouth. I could have embraced him then and there for his sheer downright bravery

## OF A V.A.D.

and sweet humour. He has learnt to suffer and to smile. Who is it? Yes, Longfellow is it not? who writes—

“Oh how sublime a thing it is  
To suffer and *be strong*.”

Good-bye with this for this week, sister mine.  
Your RED X NURSE.

## LETTER XVI

*May 9th.*

A LITTLE Roman Catholic priest has turned up here who reminds me of St. Francis of Assisi, the first Saint you taught me to love. You would be interested in him. He must belong to the order of Franciscans, for he wears their dress always, i.e. a brown habit with a cord, and sandals on his feet ; but I do not know to what nationality he belongs, and I find it hard to understand, what he says when he speaks to me—which he obviously objects most strongly to doing. I often wonder why they say Catholics want to convert one : I always find they avoid controversy like the plague ; which Non-Conformists do not. One does not hear the Catholic point of view at all—unless one digs for it.

This little priest is thin and pale and soft—and he wears a beard. Indeed, he seems extremely uninteresting—at first. He sidles away and will not



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look at you, and is meek and humble of heart, —until something annoys him.

He appeared first out of the village, now and again, when he was called upon, for there is no Roman Catholic Chaplain with us. But since the wounded began to pour in from the battle I told you about, he has been constantly here. Indeed, that first night when we were up to our eyes in work he was flitting about all the time, and before I left "Casualty," which had been turned into a temporary ward for some of the worst cases, he came to me and said :

"'Se good Co'nel hav' given me permizzon to re-main wis se soldiers who are so ill, all se ni-it. I wot be ha-py if you wot also grant your sansction." Which was not only polite, but so sweet of him that it filled me with happiness ! for one hates leaving the poor boys alone with the orderlies, even if one can do nothing but comfort them by one's presence. However, we have to obey orders and go off duty sometimes.

He must have been tired too, for he had been in the Hospital all day. Where he got his meals I know not ; but perhaps a piece of bread given him in charity was eaten happily by the well with a drink of water to wash it down like St. Francis, for, as I said, he always appeared so meek until to-day

## LETTERS

when he was annoyed, when I spoke to him for the second time.

But you know it may have been my fault. For I really do not understand Catholicism in the least.

He horrified me by refusing "dying consolations" to one of his flock, and the poor soul so collapsed after he had left his side that I indignantly followed up the little man and begged him to come back to the patient and give him what he craved.

At first he looked very astonished, and then his eyes blazed and in his own language he positively *stormed*—for one minute. Then "Pardon," he said, and was gone.

What a brute I am, probably the little man knew best, and in any case I did no good, but made him suffer, for I know that he will be so sorry for having been angry, since he is a disciple of the gentle St. Francis.

O'Shaunassy's quiet eyes met mine as I stood there; he must have witnessed this little scene, for it happened at the foot of his bed. So I said to him, to defend myself from what I imagined was a reproachful gaze:

"You cannot say that your priest was right that time, O'Shaunassy."

"Sure he must be right, Sister," he answered directly, "for has he not the care of our souls as

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you have of our bodies? He knows about one entirely as you know about the other."

"But I am worried about the patient, as a patient. O'Shaunassy; surely it is not right to upset any sick man like that!"

"And is not his work often upset by your work! And does he say a word of that at all—except asking your pardon, Sister?"

"Oh, Shan!" I exclaimed, sitting down by the poor broken body, suddenly realizing it, suddenly overflowing with pity for it. "Oh, Shan! where do you get your faith?"

"What's that, Sister?"

"It's your faith, Shan! Where do you get it?"

"My Faith now, is it? Do you mean the Mass?"

"We'll say it's the Mass—I mean it all—but we will say it's believing now in transubstantiation. Do you really believe in that, as well as that the little priest can do no wrong?"

"I did not say he could do no wrong. The Blessed Pope can decree no wrong any more than Joffre there can decree no wrong to them Frenchies. And that word you used for the Mass, Sister, now? 'Twas a difficult word entirely."

"Now, don't be [offended, O'Shaunassy, or I shall not allow myself to speak to you again in case it upsets you!"

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"It was puzzled I was, Sister, to know what you said!"

(It was not quite that, but you see, even O'Shaunassy and I get hot over our little religious arguments as everyone does. Is not this odd? But your letter on this subject! I wanted to go on.)

"I said transubstantiation, Shan."

"And you mean the Mass! Is it not the Blessed Lord's body we take and no more about it. . . . 'Tis the little priest himself who brought It just now. . . ."

The words they sing at the church, my little sister, where I always went with you, came ringing in my head. Chanting in tune, which I hummed out loud to O'Shaunassy:

"I am the Living Bread . . . which came down from Heaven!"

He smiled and shut his eyes: and then he murmured—

"'Tis a hard saying——"

"Why! that is what the people said to our Lord, isn't it, Shan? And here am I asking you! Why! in the very beginning it was too hard a saying—'And they all went away,' do you remember? and Christ thought that the disciples would also go, for He turned to them and said 'Wilt thou also leave Me?'"

## OF A V.A.D.

“ Sure ’twas St. Peter had the answer for Him ! ”

“ Yes—‘ Lord to whom shall we go ? ’ ”

“ And to who would they have gone at all ! ”

I had melted into a dream—as I thought of your letter and stood by the bed of O’Shaunassy—my spirit was caught up trying to solve this mystery, “ the Bread that I will give is my Flesh.” I was wondering, too, if I had heard that text expounded at St. Alban’s, Holborn, or in the Presbyterian in which I had been brought up as a child ; for I had heard it ! But not expounded ! Why had I never heard it explained ? Was it inexplicable ? “ How can a man give his flesh to eat ? ”

Coming back to earth I involuntarily said these words aloud.

“ How can a man give his flesh to eat ? ”

“ Why ! ” exclaimed O’Shaunassy with great joy, “ ’tis the words of the Gospel you’re saying, and ’tis yourself that knows it fine ! ”

“ So I do, Shan—‘ Except ye eat of My Flesh and drink of My Blood ye shall not have Everlasting Life.’ It was too hard for them and so they all turned away. How sad He must have been when they did that ! ”

“ Ah ! but the Blessed St. Peter stood by the side of Him ! ”

\* \* \* \* \*

## LETTERS

Such is the faith of O'Shaunassy ! How he would have loved St. Alban's, Holborn ! But would he ? " Ah ! but the Blessed St. Peter stood by the side of Him," and though Father S—— loved Him too, we have no St. Peter there.

It's all rather complicated, you see, in my mind, and though I do try to leave the question alone, it will protrude itself. And then your letters ! I love every word of them, but I cannot grasp fundamental truths as you do—I cannot understand.

Your RED X NURSE.

## OF A V.A.D.

### LETTER XVII

*May 26th.*

THERE was no mail out last week—nor in, and we were so busy that I did not write, but I thought of you all the time ; you always know that.

The Bloodless One came back, as they could not arrange accommodation for a woman, or she was not satisfied with what they did arrange. At any rate, she has returned to harry me—I mean, of course, that she has returned, and does harry me, but I try to be patient ; and indeed, every one else is exceedingly kind, and the work and the patients become more and more engrossing every day.

I should so like to consult you about one—Case No. 28—in my ward. He is the most pitiful object, the most perplexing, most incomprehensible of all my patients, not that you and I can do anything figuratively for him, any more than the Powers that be, can, or any one else—unless it is the Mouse ! It is possible that the Mouse, during those times

## LETTERS

when he becomes a Lion, might do some good with those wonderful nimble quick white fingers of his, if he made up his mind to try. The patient is in a comatose condition, and has been for months. At least he was so when we arrived, and I believe it was after the great battle of the 'Witches' Nest, which happened just before he was brought in. He has never been moved from this, our observation, or Casualty ward, because no one knows what to make of him or where to send him, and they are afraid also to move him in case of further injury to his head ; for it is his head that has been wounded, and his right arm.

The obscureness of the whole matter rises from the fact that his disc has been lost. They declare that it was not there when he came in, that, in fact, his coat also had gone and everything that might lead to finding out who he is. We are under the impression that he comes from New Zealand or Australia. He is that type of man : bronzed in patches above where a vest with short sleeves, such as they wear on stations and at mines in the Colonies, would be worn ; these patches were so brown that they have not altogether faded from his very white and satiny skin, and his hands, which are beautifully formed, are still hardened in the palms. He is very big indeed, although now woefully wasted, and very



## OF A V.A.D.

good looking, although gaunt beyond words, with excellent teeth and a finely proportioned body.

His condition is thus: though totally unconscious he can and does swallow liquid food, his breathing is regular and his pulse good. One would think he slept until one tried to waken him, and except that his arm is damaged, and also one eye by the bullet which is lodged above it—all nicely healed up now—nothing would be amiss if he would only wake up: the other eye when you lift the lid remains in a fixed stare, or you would not believe that there was anything wrong with him.

Here then lies somebody's darling—some one is grieving for him, wondering about him, thinking about him. "Missing" he must be posted. But did none of his pals, none of his comrades, miss him first after the fight? Look for him when they came in?

Yes, but—well, it is hard for an ordinary soldier to come into Hospital to look for his friends, and the Staff could not have known him: again, all his comrades have been moved. They have been changing the troops on this Front almost constantly since and before we came.

That is one of my cases, the only one who has remained very long, for it is quite an odds and ends sort of ward, this one of ours, out of which they are

## LETTERS

moved very soon. You see, cases often become very complicated here. A query appendic may turn out to be typhoid : a slightly wounded man may develop malaria : a broken headed one meningitis : or a broken limb may go septic. So it goes on, and I may not become fond of my patients, except as a huge institution ! And I have so many with " Casualty ! " All the out-patients who live in the enormous tent outside are mine—with their big wounds, and their little wounds, their great pains and little pains ; and terrors, and hopes, and fears. Mine, and the Red Cross man's. Which reminds me of the Colour-Sergeant who was admitted to-day, after a week in the tent, which he hated. He is one of the biggest men I have ever seen.

" It unnerved me, it did," he explained, sitting down and looking very pale, when he came in this morning. " All the week watching them poor chaps eat their meals with the bandages round their 'eads, and their 'ands. And I do 'ate the smell of carbolics so."

This nice person has worked himself up from the rankest of the ranks, through sheer bravery and desperado. He will have dozens of " ribbons " to his honour when he's finished with this War. But he is exceedingly modest and retiring and shy as a rule, and at times speaks good English, until

## OF A V.A.D.

he becomes excited,—then it comes from “down South.”

The Red Cross man motioned me to take his temperature, which registered 104, and he was seen *statim* by the Mouse, who happened to drop in, and ordered wardward.

“Would you like the stretcher?” asked the Red Cross man kindly, seeing how white and “sweaty,” as he expressed it, the poor fellow had become when the Mouse had left us.

“I certainly will never walk there on my two feet!” said the Sergeant sullenly. “Nor will I ever walk again, seeing as how they are goin’ to cut my insides out! It goes again’ my repulsion, *that it do*; havin’ it done. I never thought I’d live to see this day. Oh, how my poor mother would ’owl!”

“Come!” said the Red Cross man. “It isn’t half so bad as it sounds. “You who faced Devil’s End, single handed at one time, in the battle too!”

“Forbye I faced them ’ounds!” exclaimed the Sergeant, taking off his boots viciously. “That’s not to say I’m agoin’ to enjoy a smellin’ of your stinkin’ carbolics for weeks on end, in the wards, and such! Them cowardly blaggardly swine! I know how to plunk into them all right; but it goes agin’ my repulsion to tackle that little white

## LETTERS

man in there ! with his ghastly knives, and smother-in' smells ! ”

He waved towards the door from which the Mouse had disappeared, and wiped his face slowly with a huge red pocket-handkerchief.

“ Don't think of tackling him ! ” laughed the Red Cross man. “ You're much too big, Sergeant—besides, it's his game now to tackle you ; and ' smothering ' is nice if you take it easy, and don't you forget it. Fighting under chloroform is strictly forbidden here, please remember.”

The Sergeant dismally got upon the stretcher and the orderlies winking at each other over his weight still more dismally lifted him away.

“ Whatever you says, man alive,” he continued, “ I stays by my word. It goes again' my repulsion to be cut up by him ; and I am all of a tremble at the thought o' it—and non-pulsed as well.”

The Red Cross man swung round, smiling faintly : “ Non plussed, repulsed—sounds like Latin,” he murmured, and then sadly :

“ Quare me repulisti ? Quare tristis incedo ? ”<sup>1</sup>

“ Do you ? ” I said, suddenly remembering the wound in his head.

I was spreading ointment on lint, and he came

<sup>1</sup> “ Why hast Thou cast me off ? Why do I go sorrowful ? ”

## OF A V.A.D.

over near the slab to wash his hands at the basin beside it. I did not expect him to answer directly, but I did rather expect the sort of answer he would give, as he soaped his fingers and let the water splash over them—I am getting used to the Red Cross man—

“ ‘ My son, be not wearied out by the labours which thou hast undertaken for My sake, nor let tribulation cast thee down : but let my Presence strengthen and comfort thee. I am well able to reward thee above all measure. Thou shalt not long toil here. Peace shall come in one day, which is known unto the Lord—blessed joy, secure rest.’ Therefore shalt thou not say—‘ *Quare tristis incedo dum affligit me inimicus.*’ ”<sup>1</sup>

“ But who is your enemy ? ”

He looked at me at last—piercingly, sadly, unfathomingly.

“ I am my enemy.”

The Colonel came in then, and he sprang to attention, the subordinate officer in him coming out of dreams into being. What is this man with the voice and hands and manners of a fine gentleman? The queer roughness of his person contradicting them almost as much as his quaint humility, and the heavy ammunition boots for ever

<sup>1</sup> Why do I go sorrowfully whilst the enemy afflicts me ? ”

## LETTERS

on his feet do. What is the secret of the man—  
this sadness, or sin of his?

Ah, little sister, what a mixed up old world it all  
is!

Your RED X NURSE.

## OF A V.A.D.

### LETTER XVIII

*June 3rd.*

**I** HAVE been on night duty for a week, and am more than usually night duty mummified. But really it has been a privileged week of long brain rests, and limb rests too, for I sleep most uncommonly well, even in a tent. There is something, to me, so satisfactory about that hot bath and "turning in" after the long night watches, and there is a "Presence" with one in the deep silences which never comes by day—at least to *us*, in the busy wards. But does it not come to others I wonder! To weary souls, patients waking from chloroform; women who have just borne children; soldiers who sleep from sheer exhaustion, after heavy miles of tramping, and wounds that bled: those from whom fever has passed; those who rest after pain! Perhaps it does—the glow on the faces of our little French brothers; the placidness on storm-lined rough-hewn ones; the smiles from the

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weak. Whence does the calm, the peace proceed ? For it is here ; just as it was at home.

A friend wrote to me last week about a brother of hers, who is missing from "somewhere about here." They had the report about two and a half months ago, and a quaint thought will keep on pressing itself forward to the front of my brain that this may be No. 28 of my ward—you know, the man I told you about, who is for ever unconscious.

Now I am, as you can very well guess, very busy indeed these days, and so I am going to write to you at the same time as I try to piece together the sections of this problem. Alas ! a very difficult task this, since the principal component lies mute and senseless, we suppose. At any rate "it" is "missing."

Now let us see !

The brother answers the personal description of No. 28.—(What a thing to ask me to do ! Try and trace a missing relative with all the hundreds gone ! And we with more than we can do. Only—we can't do more than we can do, as I used to comfort myself by thinking after that last battle.)—Both are well over six feet, well made, fair haired, blue eyed, good teeth and both have an arm injured, but which arm, in the case of my friend's brother, I have not ascer-



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tained. And my man faintly resembles the photograph of oh, such a good-looking boy of eighteen, taken eighteen years ago which my friend sends me. Her brother was with an Australian contingent; mine, might have been. Hers joined up directly war was declared as a trooper, and after Gallipoli had been sent home on sick leave. Then he rejoined his battalion, and they came here some five or six months ago and he wrote home to his wife very happily after several spells in the trenches. He had married, while in Australia, a squatter's daughter—whatever that may quite mean—and had some hard tussles with Nature; but Fate had smiled upon him just before he left home the first time, so that his wife had successfully carried on the farm, and made it pay quite handsomely during his first absence.

Then, such is Destiny; just before his name appeared in the Casualty list, several elder sons and male heirs in succession who had been there also—killed—and so he came into the estate of his fathers before him, a baronetcy and a beautiful place in Kent.

This luckily will not be lost to his wife and children in any case, for, if you please, she gave birth to twin sons lately. War babies whom their father has not heard of—much less seen, poor fellow.

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The little Australian mother of these youngsters, my friend states, is most practical, and devoted to the "Missing" one and the children, of whom there is one other, a girl, who does not count much to us; and immediately she heard of all these vicissitudes which affected her so closely she set sail for England, and arrived safely enough—self, babies, and all.

Now I know this place of the Urquhart-Kelly's, and it is truly a very magnificent property, with a beautiful park stretching away before the fine old Georgian house. How lovely it would be if it did belong to my poor patient! But how could one send him home on trial, even if it could be supposed that he might be the Baronet? I am afraid it is too like a penny novelette to come true. Yet strange things happen now-a-days.

Again let us tackle these papers:—

(a) A notice from the Commonwealth Forces of Australia stating that Terence Cecil Urquhart-Kelly of a certain battalion (giving his number and the particulars of his unit) was "wounded" somewhere in this part of the country on a certain date. This date fits in with the date of the Battle of the Witches' Nest, when—this is important—Anzacs were on this line, and when our friend within, *might* have been wounded.

(Vague, yes! It certainly does not tell us much.)

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(b) An "answer to inquiries," i.e. about how, when, and where he was wounded. It simply says "was wounded" on such and such a date.

(Nothing fresh gleaned herefrom.)

(c) A letter from the Medical Department answering further inquiries—dated a *month later*, saying—"We ascertain that your husband is doing as well as can be expected."

(My friend says that now, his wife—who up till then had taken things as calmly and bravely as most wives and mothers do—dear hearts—grew most miserable and impatient, for it seemed an impossible state of affairs that neither his comrades, the Military authorities, nor he himself should write definitely to say how he was wounded. It was at this time that she set sail for England, and she was in a state bordering on frenzy when she received the next communication upon landing.)

(d) The report that he was "missing."

(Well, she simply went to Urquhart House and took up her abode there, moving heaven and earth from that point of vantage to find her husband. Some of the relations were not charitable about this move, they could not believe in the babies, you see, who made all the difference: but my friend backed her up. As she writes, possession is nine-tenths of the law all the world over. Besides, was

## LETTERS

not "my Lady Kelly" friendless, homeless, alone, and burdened with the care of three small children in a strange country, to her—and that at war, and extremely *serious* after sunny Australia.)

(e) Then hope revived. Came a letter from Kelly's comrade :

"So sorry not to have answered your inquiries before—but I did not receive your letter, having also myself been pretty badly hit and not allowed to read. Also regret that your husband was wounded and is temporarily missing. I say temporarily, for I saw him hit, and also brought in.

"Then came my own turn and we were separated. But cheer up."

(Signed.)

(f) This was soon followed, upon inquiries, by one from his Commanding Officer :—

*Copy of same.*

"Kelly was all right when I came away; he was one of a party detailed later in the day as stretcher-bearers; this party did excellent work. They were ducking down No Man's Land and while taking shelter in a shell hole one lobbed right alongside them and got them all three. Jones, one of the three, made them take Kelly out first. I know I was told that Kelly had passed through the dressing

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station. I think honestly I should not be unduly alarmed, and I feel sure that he will turn up in England, and very pleased he'll be too.

*(Signed.)*

(So they tried to find Jones and the other of the three. But the latter had died, and when they at last found Jones he writes in the same unsatisfactory way—I wish that I could have five minutes' conversation face to face with this man; his letter gives so little information, yet I feel that he could help us more than any one else.)

(g) "I am unable to give you further particulars"—this is evidently written by a second party it is so extremely stiff—"but that three of us were hit together and all passed through the first dressing station. Since then I have heard nothing further":

*(Signed.)* "Jones."

(h) Now we get the lawyers who look after the property looking for Kelly. But with less result; although much more paper and many more words are used. I need not repeat all this. Though one of them says rather pathetically and kindly in his letter to the poor little wife, "We seem to come against nothing but a stone wall whichever way we go. But keep on hoping."

Next!

## LETTERS

(i) An envelope. It is addressed to the subject of this inquiry, and dated in London three weeks before the battle of Witches' Nest. The interesting point about it is, that it has been here before! For in one corner is stamped the name of this town, and—in red ink is written, "Field Hospital 8," in an unknown hand—I have inquired right through the building: and in another hand "Stationary"; and in a third hand "present condition maintained." Then across the envelope, "Unable to trace. Return Sender." (My friend thinks that this envelope is sinister and mysterious. She says it looks as if something horrible had occurred: that some of the battalion must have known he was in Hospital: that they saw him in Hospital and that they did not want to acknowledge some frightful thing! But we know that is only the workings of an overwrought heart on the mind. I hope to be able to put these fears at rest if I do nothing else.)

(j) Last of all—and the latest, is a letter from the Surgeon-General of our Local Forces.

"In answer to your letter of the —— with reference to your husband, No. —— Private Kelly —— batt. A.I.F., I have caused inquiries to be made in —— and the following report has been received from Officer Commanding B. Coy., —— Battalion.

"I have made inquiries regarding Private Kelly

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and have ascertained from Private Squires, who was with him at the time, 'that he had his arm badly smashed by an H. E. shell. Squires went back for stretcher-bearers and did not see Kelly again.' (Note.—Squires is quite a new name in the game.) 'But Private Jones, who was wounded by the same shell, has written from England to Private Ellis, and stated that Private Kelly was taken in before him (Jones). He was then alive, but a third man, who also fell at the same time, has since died.'

"I have made inquiries at A.H.2. but cannot find any records of Private Kelly having gone through there. This is all the information I am able to gather at present, but Private Ellis is writing to Private Jones to-night to see if he can supply any more information. If any further information comes through I will advise you."

*(Signed)* for Surgeon-General A.I.F.

—Now, my dear little sister, are you any nearer climbing that stone wall than I am? Can you make any suggestions as to how I am to search for this needle in the bundle of hay! Yes! by asking the Mouse to operate on No. 28.

Well, I will do that to-morrow.

Now I must really go to bed—I heard them singing in the church "Oh, with what joy they went

## LETTERS

away!" a long, long time ago. But I wanted to tell you about this case that oppresses my heart. Oh! if only No. 28 were Kelly how happy I should be. Which reminds me of a song the costers used to sing in the alley-way behind our old Hospital at home, "Has any one here seen Kelly?" and that makes me so *long* for you, more than ever. But I can't afford to. I must go to bed and to sleep.

Your R. X NURSE.



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### LETTER XIX

*June 9th.*

**L**AST Sunday afternoon, feeling a desire for space, for something new, I slipped away from the Camp through the brushwood, and down a bridle path leading away from the sun.

It is June, and in this place it is a "Juner" June than we get in England. I mean that it is more summery, and the season seems more advanced than it is at home at this time of the year. It is more sunshiny and brighter altogether. Well, we need all the sunshine we can get to brighten up our present dwellings.

It was delightful to get away by oneself for a walk, and the unknown bridle path was simply delicious, so cool and shady, while the silver and gold played through the leaves above and the warmth beyond drew the spices up from the bosom of the earth. I sniffed with joy the minty, earthy, leafy, and entirely sweet smell of the forest. The

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sun was behind me, as it should be ; indeed, I chose this particular alluring path for that very reason—the lights and shades and twinkling shadows are right so, the browns and greens and greys of the woods and the leaves and ferns and flowers of the undergrowth show up best like this, and one can see the wild squirrel things—and the birds. Besides, greatest reason of all ! It follows that one will return to face the sun as it is sinking in the west, so that one can try again and again to catch that exquisite flash of purest liquid green which poets dream of—when it passes ; and before, can flash one's eyes on the “ flaming monstenance in the west,” as some one calls it, and bathe in the twilight sea of skies, the blue and mauves, crimson and greys, pinks and purest white and gold.

Now unhappily the Colonel's little dog Bimbo saw and followed me. Booming at him was no use ; with a wild leap he scattered some peaceful sparrows, disappeared, crackled and rushed through bracken, then back again “ agrinning and aslathering of his jaws.” What could I do but pat him ?

It was a dusty tiny village street that the lane led me into, and I was deeply engrossed in glancing into the small gardens I passed ; with the strange children in their thick boots and pigtails—at least the girls had pigtails—and in all the stir of abso-

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lutely new and strange surroundings when I ran into Fluff looking very happy and the Black man, looking very glum.

"Where's the Colonel?" Fluff threw at me as she passed. I was so angry. Why had she said that? There was the dog, certainly, but she had no business to mention the Colonel like that to me in front of the Black man.

Why did it make me so angry? I do not care for him a bit more than I do for the others, and I certainly do not go out with him for drives except with them. These drives are very pleasant, but they would be just as pleasant with the Mouse, or the Black man.

But would they? Certainly I like the Colonel. Only it is quite in a platonic fashion since he has a wife, though faithless. But has he a wife if he is divorced? "Of course he has," you will say. But would *he*?

Personally I do not, cannot believe in divorce; if the whole world, in Church or State granted it, still I should stand firm. Our Lord's own words are unmistakable, "Whomsoever shall put away his wife and marry another shall commit adultery."

Well, I had better not see so much of the Colonel if that is how the others are going to talk. But how can I see less of him? It would be so silly,

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perfectly idiotic to give up my turn in the car. How I love those drives! The rush through the air, the pleasant companionship; to hear the men laugh and talk; even to see the land is a delight; it is all such a refreshing change after the wards. Still, perhaps it would be right to give them up—if the others talk? Why don't they talk about Fluff? They never do, and yet yesterday I saw her . . . but I won't tell tales. We will return to the village.

Thoroughly annoyed I stumped on. Gone was the sunshine, the interest in gardens, the laughter of children. What a sulky, horrid, ill-tempered person I am becoming to be sure! How much I need you, for having you around made me good, just as not having you seems to make me bad.

The village church bell rang hastily, wheezily, as I wandered on, and instinctively I followed up the sound until I reached the square.

In the middle of it stood the Calvary. It seems to guard the village—and to say to all the poor little people: "Whatsoever they do to you; Whatsoever happens, did they even so to Me." They are suffering so, these villagers. On one side, the church with its great doors flung wide, stood, and its altar in full view from the street blazed away with candle lights. Of course I went in. I genuflected, as we

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used to do at St. Alban's, and sank on to a hard form. The smell of incense and flowers was very sweet, and the lights were illuminating. I knew what they meant : " I am the Light of the World " : they said " A city which is set on a hill cannot be hid."

There is a nice little blue altar to Our Lady on one side of the chancel, and one to the Sacred Heart on the other, surmounted by a divinely appealing picture of the Christ. The " Stations " are good plaques too, they seemed to satisfy one, and over the pulpit is an immense crucifix. But I like best a Pieta on the south wall. It is all blue and white with a smiling Bambino, and it reminded me of one at home we know. At the foot of it, the people had placed great bunches of wild meadow-sweet stuff, and some of them knelt there beseechingly, before the service begun.

\* \* \* \* \*

I suppose that the service was benediction, for there was music and censer swinging, and adoration. I did not understand it a bit but grew happier each moment ; and when the little priest, looking quite glorious in all his golden embroidered robes, held up the Blessed Sacrament and blessed us, I began to feel quite good again, and not angry with

## LETTERS

Fluff, or worried over the divorce question—which after all does not concern me at all, does it ?

What a very dull letter this week, and all about myself ! But I really am rather important to you, am I not, my dearest, since you are all the world to me.

R. X.

## OF A V.A.D.

### LETTER XX

*June 16th.*

**I**T'S a steady old week of work that we have put through this week, and really my limbs relaxed with gratitude in the comfortable front seat of the Colonel's motor car this afternoon. You see, after all, I knew it was best to take no notice of Fluff's remarks, or my own thoughts on that horrible thing Divorce. It would be so exceedingly senseless, seeing that the Colonel is just as single-minded in the friendship between us as I am. He gives us such jolly books to read, too, and I love discussing them. He is also teaching me to drive the car, though to-day I was much too tired to take any notice of "clutches," and "wheels," and "horns," and things.

Criss-Cross and the Mouse sat at the back to begin with, she and I exchanging seats on the return journey, when the Mouse tried to hold my hand. I wonder if he tried it on with Criss-Cross! He is working so well, and doing such ripping operations

## LETTERS

in the theatre that one could almost forgive him anything. He does not, all the same, get on very well either with the Territorials or the Australians, but in Casualty the Red Cross man generally saves the situation. I was much amused one day to hear him taking the deposition of a very pale, very thin splinter of a "Terrier" who was brought into "Casualty"—on a stretcher, fainting with abdominal pain—when he (the Mouse) happened to be on duty.

"What's the matter?" he asked in his jerky way. He has rather a squeaky voice like a school-boy's.

"Don' know, sir."

"What do you complain of?"

"Noffink."

"Don't complain of anything?"

"No use complainin'."

Rather amused, the Mouse took his temperature, which was decidedly up. So he proceeded to question him again.

"Have you a headache?"

"No, sir."

"Any abdominal discomfort?"

"What, sir! No, sir."

"You don't complain of anything at all?"

"No, sir."



## OF A V.A.D.

The Mouse was digging and poking and listening all over the poor "Terrier's" body meanwhile, and though the rings round his—the patient's—eyes grew darker, and his cheeks paler, he made no sign.

"You mean to tell me you have no pain at all : with all this distension !" said the Mouse desperately.

"I means to tell you nuffink of the sort !" cried the poor victim, even more desperately, then. "It's awful. It's sumthink awful, the pain is—when yer pokes me, sir ;—astin' yer pardon, sir, but would yer leave me alone to die like in peace. I never asted to be brought in 'ere. I don't like it, straight ! There now ! I don't like it—straight I *don't*. There !"

He was most malevolent now ; but the Mouse had grown relentless.

"I would not have hurt you if you had answered my questions. You said you had no pain."

"I never ! Yer never said nuffink about a pain ! Yer never arst me !"

"Well, where is it ?"

"In me guts, sir. That's where it is."

Covered with confusion—how the Mouse got through Hospital no one knows—he quickly said :

"What's your name ?"

"'Erne."

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“ What ? ”

“ 'Erne.”

“ Erne what ! I don't want your Christian name, you booby ! Your surname.”

“ 'Erne.”

“ This is hopeless ! Orderly, see to this man ! ” Poor 'Erne, he turned a piteous face towards the “ Mouse ” and then his temper got the best of him altogether, and he simply bawled :

“ H—h-e-r-n-e. ‘ *Erne* ’ ! ” ; and subsided beneath the blanket covering, and glowered. . . . As nothing more could be got from him, and rather naturally, I think, he was whisked away to the ward, and the Mouse did a beautiful appendixical operation upon him that afternoon in the theatre.

The Mouse really rather enjoyed all this, and when he thinks any one is looking rather blue, yells “ H-e-r-n-e, spells ‘ Erne.’ ” And 'Erne too has got used to the Mouse. “ 'E ain't so bad,” he explained to some of the others when he came up to report later ; “ not when yer gets to know 'im like ; though 'e do seem 'ateful when 'e asts questions.” This was said quite openly in Casualty to some Australians who wanted to fly before the small man when they found that he had come up to inspect their wounds in place of the Black man.

But to return, as you say, to the drive. We had

## OF A V.A.D.

been chattering away on the back seat about the patients when suddenly :

"I'm very lonely," said the Mouse plaintively.

"Every one in this world is," I answered thoughtfully. "We came into it alone, we go out of it alone, and it seems to me we have to live alone, always, always, always—our souls, you know." This sounded so tragic, and my own voice so alarming that I added hastily, "It's the atmosphere! I could not help it. Now tell me about the girl you are engaged to!"

"There is no girl! That's brutal; but I will if you will hold my hand! I only want you to hold it as if you were my mother, you know!"

"Why, I am everybody's mother!" I exclaimed indignantly—"and I have not a grey hair in my head! What do you think the Colour-Sergeant said when I first saw him after you cut him up so nicely? He said, 'Lift me 'ead on two pillars nurse, and give me a drink o' water, a long one, there's a good girl!' Of course, I declined with thanks. In the ward of Criss-Cross too! And he not half an hour out of the theatre! He got very angry indeed then, and he said sarcastically, 'You—you always reminded me of my mother'—(now please, my dear, *think* what his mother would

## LETTERS

be like!)—‘but now . . . you remind me of my GRANDMOTHER!! The ‘ard ‘earted old willan she was too!’ ”

The Mouse laughed delightedly, “I’m glad somebody else repulses him,” he said.

“*He non-pulsed me, any way.*”

“And now to ‘return to our muttons’ as the Australians say. Will you hold my hand?”

A brilliant idea struck me. Sweetly I whispered back.

“I will, if you will do something for me.”

“Anything!” he answered ardently.

“Two things then. The first is easy. (And it must be ‘under the rug,’ because the Colonel and Criss-Cross must *not* see.”)

“The first thing?”

“You are to think of the girl in England *all the time.*”

“Right O! But there is no girl. Next, please.”

“Operate on my No. 28——”

A long pause. The Mouse is not a fool, and I had asked a big and a difficult thing of him. At last he said: (I was secretly enjoying the fact that hedges and ditches were rushing past us—we were nearing home, and the Mouse is such a keen surgeon that he had become wrapt in contemplation of the case thus brought before his mind’s eye: but I

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knew that if he promised he would perform.)

"It's like this:" he hesitated and ticked off on his fingers. "(1) He does not belong to our lot—would there be a fuss?"

"He is quite completely lost," I told him eagerly. "You can see by a glance at certain papers in the office."

Of course the men have not time to go into every case entirely. Would that they had.

"We will say (1) passed: (2) Would the patient stand it?"

"Oh, do let us risk that. He is so utterly useless as he is."

"Passed: (3) Will the Colonel allow it? Let-well-alone, you know. I can get round the Black man."

"I will get his sanction without a doubt!"

This was foolish! The Mouse gave me a knowing wink and went for my hand. I let it lie passively in his—and said: "This means you will do it?"

"Is there time?" My hand trembled in his.

"Make time. Yes, you will, you nice person." And I squeezed his hand.

This will horrify, and disgust and annoy you! Still it happened and there you are!

But I do not love any one, *any one* half so much as

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I do you, my little sister. You believe that, don't you, and see what a long letter I have written to you with my own hand—that sinned !

R. X NURSE.

LETTER XXI

*June 23rd.*

**A**NOTHER Sunday—and so much to tell you about.

To get away from it all, to be alone, to think, I went for a walk first this afternoon, and coming back, am writing by the Shrine of Our Lady of the Cherry Blossoms. So sweet and calm and fresh it is always, here away from the turmoil.

Some words of O'Shaunassy's hit me full in the face as I arrived and read over your letter, for I found myself saying, "Hail Mary, full of grace."

"They are angel's words," he had said. (He was talking about his Rosary as usual: and then I remembered, "And the Virgin's name was Mary, and the angel came in unto her and said Hail, thou that art highly favoured"—only "Hail Mary, full of Grace" is much prettier and means exactly the same thing—"the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women.")

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With all his Irishness Shan is so extraordinarily simple. I think that God must have spoken to him as he lay there in his agony: "They are angel words"—he had said, and the full significance had not struck me then. I had taken no notice at the time but said rather petulantly, I am afraid, "It seems so senseless to repeat the same prayers over and over again, O'Shaunassy."

"That sounds God's truth if it was not that you was thinking of something else all the time that you said them!" he explained.

"Worse and worse!" I had answered, though I knew it was his Irishness. But he went on very eagerly:

"Sure 'tis the words of the angel you'd be *saying* but 'tis of God Himself you'd be *thinking*!"

"Shan," I exclaimed, "how you *believe* that Christ was the Son of the Living God!"

"And why not at all, Sister, since He *is* that, and is it you Protestants now that don't believe it?"

"I won't be called a Protestant, Shan," I said. "Of course we believe it. You Catholics think we believe nothing at all and that we won't go to Heaven when we die: and all sorts of things like that."

"Now 'tisn't the truth you're saying, Sister! Did I not tell you that 'tis the blessed General himself



## OF A V.A.D.

I never stop praying for when it comes to the death of Christ on the beads? ”

“ What do you mean by, ‘ when it comes to the Death of Christ on the beads, ’ Shan? ”

“ This is what I mean : on Monday and Thursday, saying the words of Hail Mary on them you think of the Birth of Christ. On Tuesday and Friday, of the Death ; and on Wednesday and Saturday of the Resurrection.”

“ But how extraordinarily difficult ! ” I exclaimed.

“ It is. But ’tis not so hard on a Friday ! Faith ! the agony in the garden is like waiting in the trenches ; the scourging and crowning with thorns and the carrying the cross, that’s the hunger and cold and aching feet of it all ; and the friends of you falling beside you. Then there’s the crucifixion ! Sure, it’s that makes it easy to bear,”—he waved to his own poor mangled body—“ and there’s nothing else in it ! Where would I be without the beads and the Blessed Mass and Holy Church now ? And where would Pat be—and the General ! ”

“ Tell me about the General.”

“ When he—God rest his soul ! for he was hit directly after he sent me with a message to the regiment—when he was lying down there in the dressing tent sweltering in his death throes, I was sent in to him. ’Twas the despatch I’d in the

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tunic on me, and the orders to pass it from hand to hand sent me there. And 'twas himself who took it from me and told me to stay by the side of him. . . . 'Twas then that I said the prayers for the scourging—and the crowning of thorns—for he learnt from the paper he read—how 'twas under his orders the brigade was destroyed. Glory be to the Saints ! but how he suffered ! . . . But he died like Our Lady, holding on to the Cross. All wounded and bleeding and sore in his mind he was, poor boy. How I wished for his mother to wake him ! . . . but she was not there. So I did meself . . . just myself I did it. Poor boy ! Poor boy ! ”

Told as O'Shaunassy told it this little story touched me greatly. Poor boy ! A grey-haired General ! But only a boy when he came to die, “ all wounded, and bleeding, and sore in his mind.”

I shuffled about in O'Shaunassy's locker tidying it up, but saying nothing, so that perhaps the lad did not think I appreciated the story of this, his hero. For he added urgently, compellingly, all of a sudden—

“ Faith now ! And I tell you, Sister, that though that General was a Protestant, he was a gentleman, and he had principles, and wherever his boots were, there were his principles : and a greater gentleman never walked in them.”

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“God bless you, O’Shaunassy!” said I then, almost tearfully. And much to his astonishment.

But it was not of O’Shaunassy I came here to write, but of that other boy of mine—the haggard Australian—if Australian he is, to be sure—No. 28 in my ward.

The Mouse has operated most successfully—but alas! No. 28 *cannot remember anything at all*. I must tell you all about it in sequence, for the man still appeals *most tremendously* to my sympathy and I pray for him every day. He is such a fine fellow! If only he could remember. The Black man says that the Mouse, or rather the Lion as he is on those occasions, surpassed himself. Trepanning must be extraordinarily hard; such delicate fingering, such gentle manipulation, such strength of wrist—such sleight of hand in fact. A little mistake, and finish! Indeed, as he says, it was a ticklish job, and he is proud of the result. But he frowns when he turns away from the bed of the strong man to whom he has returned his strength, but to whom he cannot give a memory.

At the back of my mind the idea grew and grew that it might be Kelly—and I have not *quite* given up hope yet. He has got to be seen by my friends before I let that go—and it will be months before that can come to pass, and then extremely difficult

## LETTERS

to arrange : However, let me tell you about him. I was bursting to ask him questions, but it was some time before they gave permission for this. But at last came the day when I might say—

“ Can I help you try to remember your name ? ”

“ Please do,” he answered cheerfully. “ Not that it worries me much—though I should like to have some people to go home to when I can be shifted out of here.”

“ Let’s begin with Tom, Dick——”

“ Harry ! ” he almost shouted.

“ Is it Harry ? ” I almost whispered, so disappointed was I.

“ No. Only note. (1) I remembered that Harry came after Tom and Dick, and I also recollect (2) that Smith, Jones and Robinson are three very familiar names ! But I am not one of these.”

“ Right. Let’s try Jack, John——”

“ No good.”

“ Bill, Billy, Will, Willie, William ! ”

“ Kaiser ! Not me ! ” He laughed heartily at this joke, and so did I.

It was something finding a sense of humour.

“ Harry, Harold—make a sign if I hit the right nail on the head—Cecil, Alick, Edward, George, Terence——” I stopped—“ Terence, Tod, Terry, Ted. Not familiar ? ”

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"No."

"Terence, Cecil, Urquhart, Kelly."

"Why do you keep repeating Terence? What a silly name! And those others are not Christian names at all." He began to look distressed, so I switched off on to another line, feeling rather sad.

"Do you remember England?"

"Yes."

"What?"

He shut his eyes.

"London, the Houses of Parliament, the Thames. A house in a park not in London. It's a lovely house with big square windows. It is built of white stone. It is the house of my dreams. . . . Now I see . . . a—a ship—and very, very tall houses, and big trees—a place covered with snow, and huge rocky mountains, and coral islands in blue water: palm trees, natives, more ships . . . a shanty . . . wheat!"

"That sounds as if you had been in Canada. Are you a Canadian?"

"No, I am not."

"Perhaps you have been there."

"Perhaps I have."

"Do you know, I think you are a Canadian. I catch a trace of accent. You use words——"

"I am not a Canadian."

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" You are sure ? "

" Sure."

" How do you know ? "

" I don't know how."

" Are you from South Africa ? Australia ! "

" Stop. . . ."

He closed his eyes again—he was very still—presently he spoke.

" I remember a child. It is my child. It has bare feet and dances in the breeze—its almost white hair is uncovered and dances too. It's a little girl—its name is Jess. . . . I can't see beyond it—but I can see the wheat. The wheat—wheat ripples in the breeze too ; it's a glorious day—the sun shines on the fields, making them shine like troops in armour. The wheat has made me rich. . . . I say good-bye to my wife. . . . No, I can't see my wife, but there is the mother of Jess . . . she is my wife. Now I cannot see them . . . I am in a town. I join the colours, am dressed in khaki. . . . All the colours fly together, red, white, blue and the Stars of the Southern Cross. . . . Now the sun is on the hair of little Jess. . . . It's all jumbled—it's all muddled. It's—all—gone ! "

" Never mind," I said, hiding my interest and disappointment. " We will try again another day."

We have tried again and again. It's no use, but

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one day when he woke up he said quite simply "My name is 'Tuck.' " He forgets it again, but he smiles when we remind him and says, "That's it, just Tuck."

Alas, there is no Tuck amongst the names of the Missing, and it is not at all like Kelly, is it?

Sometimes he gets anxious and says, "I would like to go home—and be taken care of by those who know me—but how am I to find home? And where is little Jess—some one *must* know!"

We soothe him then, and he rests and sleeps. On the whole he is doing very well—and it is better to be alive than in perpetual coma! Besides, his memory may come back; we hope so, anyway. And every day still I say the little prayer for him—though he does not know it.

And now good night, little sister, with all my love.

Your R. X NURSE.

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### LETTER XXII

*July 7th.*

**L**AST week I did not write, as there was no mail out, and we were very busy; but you shall have a long letter this mail to make up.

I am not worrying in the least about religion now, and am not going to any more. We are too busy to think much, and there is a sort of rest about depending on a system, and leaving the thinking to other people. I am sure that dependent people are the happiest and most contented. Independence makes one discontented and peevish when thwarted.

So I offer my work, my days, and my happiness—for indeed God has given me a cup overflowing with happiness to drink these days—to Him, and He must be pleased, for “my cup runneth over” the more that I drink. “Work is Worship” after all, and we are all working together so well, and we can see for once the good we are able to do.

Not that one can write about it, for one cannot.



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Still it is there like a great Angel of Mercy blessing us. It must have been a great joy to our Lord, I should think, to heal. To feel that "virtue had gone out from Him"; that devils and death would fly before Him; that life could spring forth under His Hand.

And yet, I think that He kept the miracle not alone to Himself. "If ye have faith, ye could remove mountains": is not Christian Science built on that? Is it not the secret of Lourdes? Is it not what some surgeons (even though it is faith of a lower order, faith in *themselves*) possess, and some nurses? Ah, it is a wonderful God-given gift, and its possession should make us very humble and thankful.

Indeed, I think only those who are humble keep it—even in the case when it is only founded on faith in themselves—for pride kills it as surely and insidiously as a noxious weed kills a sweet flower.

The Bloodless One has gone forward again, under new conditions, much to her delight—and ours.

Criss-Cross is in charge, and she is so nice to work for. She never grumbles, which is t-r-e-m-e-n-d-o-u-s and does no end of good all round. She growls at *us*, you know—but not at conditions. Every one

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is a little afraid of her, but she is so fair and just, so entirely different to the Bloodless One, who has been worrying me more than ever lately.

Last Sunday evening, for instance, a Casualty came in from the camp. A little A.S.C. man who had fallen under a waggon; the wheel had gone over his chest. There was a mark there of mud and depression, which showed only too forcibly that this was true.

They had made an impromptu bed of sacks on the waggon floor and jolted him as quickly as possible to us; at least so they gave us to understand. He was in such intense agony that I thought his back was broken, and as beads of perspiration stood on his forehead, and his face was stiff with pain, I gave him a hypodermic of morphia without hesitation. The Red Cross man was off duty for once, both the younger doctors were away, and the telephone told me that the Colonel was engaged.

"What's wrong?" inquired his voice presently through that useful instrument.

"A case come in. Looks like broken ribs, or even a broken back, and the arm is torn—but only the flesh, from wrist to elbow; it's not broken, and does not bother the man."

"Quite right to give him a half of morphia. Now, leave well alone. Oh, yes—are you there? You

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had better stitch the arm ! I'll send Major Black round directly he comes in."

He rang off. Now this is the first time I had been entirely independently "on my own," and I began to feel very happy indeed—particularly as the morphia in this case took instant effect. We had not even so much trouble to remove the coat as you would imagine ; and when I began to handle the injured arm I found that the man did not feel that at all. The orderly on duty went to see about a bed, and a means of carrying the patient as comfortably as possible, as soon as the dressing waggon was drawn up, and it left me with the A.S.C. men who had brought their friend along. The condition of the one holding the patient's arm in position alarmed me by degrees, and I said to another :

"Look at that man. He is going to faint. Get him out of the way before he falls, and you take his place."

This was done, but an odd expression I now saw was on all their faces. They looked dazed and sheepish and "floppy."

"Come, men !" I said, as I sprayed the arm with lotion, and went to wash my hands again. "Your friend is all right. What is wrong with you all ?"

"Rum," said one honestly. "'E stood it us as we come past the canteen ! 'It's like this', 'e said.

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“ ‘Ave a drink at my expense ! I’ve got it on me, and I can’t take it with me. ‘Eave it out of my pocket, but ‘urry up boys,’ ‘e says. ‘ I’m sufferin’ cruel ! ’ ”

“ I hope,” I said severely (but all the time thinking how funny they are, the dears ! And how plucky ! The poor boy in his agony—remembering his friends ! And they stopping to drink), “ you did not give him any as well ! ”

“ Wherefore not, Sister ? Would we have stopped if he had not wanted it too ? ”

“ ‘E ‘ad a cravin’ ! ‘Ow could we ‘elp stoppin’ ! ‘ Jest a drop—one drop .o’ comfort,’ ‘e sez, ‘ before I dies.’ ”

“ Well ! no use crying over spilt milk, boys ; but you did wrong. Never give a patient stimulant. You have all been taught that at the Red Cross lectures : have you not ? ”

The patient slept through all this. He did not feel the needle pricks at all. The only thing that troubled him was being moved. He complained bitterly of his back when that happened. But he opened his eyes when the Bloodless One appeared. For appear she did, just as I had finished.

She sent all the men out of the room and asked me why I had not done so.

“ I could not work alone, hold the arm and so on.”

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“What business had you to sew this arm? It's atrociously done. Look at all those gaps! Ten stitches when there ought to be twenty.”

“I left them for drainage. The wound was full of dirt. Shall I thread the needle for you to put the rest in, Sister?”

“Don't be impertinent! Why did you act on your own?”

This was unanswerable. So I went over to the desk and brought out the Blue Book, opened it at a certain place and gave it to her to read.

“In cases of urgent emergency the Sister in Charge shall perform first aid without waiting for direct instructions.”

(Signed) P. M. O.

“Ah! but you are not a Sister?”

“I rang up the doctor.”

“Do not interrupt! In future you will not act on your own initiative, but will send for me.”

“Yes, Sister.”

“Bandage the arm at once. Do you not know that a wound must not be left uncovered. . . . Ah! I am relieved to see that you have washed your hands after touching that book. . . . You have omitted to paint with iodine!”

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" I have already douched with iodine ! "

" Were you not taught not to answer your superiors ? Now—do try and put that bandage on so that it will not fall off before it reaches the ward. . . . Ah ! . . . Why is the patient making so much fuss over being moved ? "

" I think his back, or perhaps only his ribs are broken, Sister. "

" How dare you diagnose ! "

" She done fine ! " presently sang out the little man when he was safely on the stretcher—up till then he had been much too busy groaning and moaning and directing his comrades to take any apparent notice. " Now boys, Wan ! " (But they were not Australians ; they could not count her out even if they had dared.) " Wot yer want t' chip at her for ? I ain't p'ining nothing like I was. I'll get better quick and show yer, miss, " nodding to me as he was carried away.

" Do you allow these men to call you Miss ? "

" They call me anything from Missus to Matron, " I answered, trying not to be sulky. This was the fuse for an explosion ! She said a lot of things which I refuse to think of. Oh, how I wish she was more reasonable ! Perhaps I am very annoying to her—it cannot be all her fault. Well, I forgive

## OF A V.A.D.

her ! And she has gone. So—finish the Bloodless One.

No. 28 is much more interesting to write about ; indeed, he is an unfailing source of interest to me. I long to find his home for him, and who he is. The man himself is so altogether appealing.

“ Nurse ! ” he called last night when I went into the ward. “ When you have time will you give me five minutes ? I’ve had a dream and it might be useful. You are so kind,” he added suddenly. “ I don’t know what I should do without you in this awful fog. What I want to say sounds childish. Only you won’t mind.”

“ Mind ! ” I cried. “ It’s a privilege and pleasure to try and help you. First I must run round to the others, then I will come back and listen to your dream. Where is that pencil and paper of yours ? Here you are—now write down all the *names* that you have thought of, however stupid they may seem.”

When I returned he had written down “ Cooyoo-pooyer ” and “ Wagawaga,” which sound rubbish ; and as he suggested quite possible to have reached his senses from the sound of birds cooing and piping in the trees round the ward.

The birds are innumerable in this park, and I listened this morning while I drank my tea in bed—

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the Sister on night duty brings this to the others when she wakes us—and the doves here mourn most distinctly in this wise: "T' cuckoo is dead." "T' cuckoo is dead," while the others answer "He's so-o cold—He's so-o cold": This is not in the least like the usual, "Coo-oo-yer"—"Coo-oo yer."

"I had been to that place which sounds like doves cooing," began poor Tuck, "I'm sure it was 'Cooyoopooyer,' and came home to find little Jess playing by the rails. She was like a bit of fluff and all in white; only a yearling, perhaps, but she could speak. I lifted her up and said: 'Where's Mam-mie?' 'Gon' t' cott,' she said. 'Gone to court?' I said, 'Who's she gone to court, little one?' She pushed me away in scorn, and went on indignantly: 'Gon' t' cott. It's K'ism. Daddy got 'ess's K'ism?' Light dawned on me. It was Christmas Day. Now nurse, listen to me with even more than your usual patience, please, for all my story sounds like rubbish. These French lads here had been talking about having been home for Christmas and how the snow had covered everything in France, and how a Crib had been smothered with snow which had been put up outside their village church. . . . Two or three of them come from the same place. I understand French too," he added suddenly;



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"that never struck me before. Yet I am sure I never was in France."

"You must have been in French Canada," I encouraged him. "You always speak about a place that sounds like Canada."

"But it was much too hot in my dream for Canada. There was no snow *at all* in that—it was intensely hot: the only snowy thing was little Jess. Shall I go on? She had meant church by 'cott.' Once in a blue moon a parson came to the school-house there and held a sing-song. He must have sent a notice after I had gone, and my wife had answered the call. 'Come,' I said to little Jess, 'Daddy wants some tea,' and a *GIN*—why, I had not noticed that before, it was an *aborigine* who made that tea, so it is not Canada I am speaking about, but Australia! Well, this native got my tea and I sat in the kitchen—quite distinctly it was a kitchen—made of beams of wood with rafters, and it had a smoked corrugated iron roof and a wood fire burning in an open fireplace which made no difference at all to the heat. It was just as hot everywhere and the pine cones and the gum burning smelt as sweet incense. There was a woman somewhere in the house singing as she swept a floor—but I did not see her. Presently Jess, who had been putting her dolls to bed on the floor at

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my feet, clambered on to my knee, and felt in my pockets again, but disappointed turned away. 'Ess wants Kis'm, daddy, so badly. Haven't 'ou dot any Kis'm for 'ittle 'Ess? ' "

No. 28 leant back on his pillows and tried to squeeze back the tears from his eyes, but they came through his eyelashes and dropped down his cheeks.

"Wipe them," I said firmly, "and don't be silly. What did you do then? "

"It is silly, isn't it? " said 28 with a gulp, "and that's why I couldn't tell any one else—I do that when I think about little Jess, all alone. Well, I must have been very fond of the little kid, for I got up and went out and saddled another horse and went into the bush the way I had come——"

"Do you remember what for? "

"It's sillier and sillier!" now laughed No. 28 to keep back the tears. "I went to get a young parrot out of a tree. I had seen the nest of them as I came that way. Green and red they were, the little squeakers! And the mother bit me when I took one——"

"Look, man!" I pounced on his hand and held up one of his fingers which had a curious wedge-shaped old cut on it. I had noticed it when I had been cleaning his nails when he was unconscious!

## OF A V.A.D.

He did look at it ! He looked at it as if we had found a mine !

“ Well, what did you do with the bird ? ”

“ I put it in my pocket, and then I went down to the dam to where I had seen an old mother sheep who had dropped twin lambs out of season. I deprived her of one of them, and took it to little Jess. She screamed with delight, and the lamb seemed to like her too. She hugged it round the neck and kissed its stupid little woolly face and pulled its long curly tail and it skipped and leaped all round the kitchen on its stupid little hoofs with its square straight legs ! . . . Her mother came in and found us laughing. . . . Then—I always forget when she comes in.”

“ But the parrot ? ”

“ I do not remember the parrot—but it was for her. I gave it to her and three gold sovereigns, too.”

“ Did you dream that ? ”

“ What ? ”

“ About the sovereigns ? ”

“ No. Why ! ” beaming with pleasure, “ I *remember* that. I remember quite distinctly her tiny open palm sinking under the weight of them, and how she threw them on the floor and danced on her little bare feet with glee when they rang and rolled

## LETTERS

and glittered. . . . Ah, nurse ! There, I'll believe in the God of O'Shaunassy, if ever I find that little darling with her golden hair ! ”

\* \* \* \* \*

So we must find Jess for him, must we not, sister ? A lamb and a bird and gold : what does it remind me of ? It sounds like a—was it ?—a dream. Do fathers in the Antipodes bring such offerings to their offspring ; do aborigines make tea in the kitchen while the masters of the house sit on hot days by the fire, and the daughters thereof—do they caper about in bare feet on the plaster floor ?

This is beyond me to answer—but the dream is pleasant and I want to find 'Ess. I can hear the cherry mouth lisping it so—'Ess. How foolish I am, sister, but to-night I am home-sick : and how I love children !

Well, it is certainly time to turn in. Good-night, my one and only sister.

Your RED X NURSE.

## OF A V.A.D.

### LETTER XXIII

*July 15th.*

I AM on night duty once again. And, oh dear me, the Colour-Sergeant has been so ill, and is so still. Just as he was going to get up after a most successful operation his temperature began to rise again. It rose and rose until it touched 109 degrees ! That was a week ago, and it has never been below 101 degrees since, yet he still lives ! Criss-Cross herself took that abnormal temperature and sponged it down, although she is the Surgical Sister, but she has had to part with the patient since, as he disturbed the other patients in that ward. In mine it does not matter, as mostly they move in and out ; so into " Casualty " he has been passed with two special orderlies to mind him night and day, and hold him down, since he has been so fractious.

When he gets fractious—the Sergeant, I mean—which sad to relate happens morning, noon and night—he is most violent to the orderlies but generally most gentle to us.

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This phase began one night very unexpectedly. Shack, who was on night duty, paid a surprise visit to the ward and found the orderly absent ; no one knows where he was, and history does not relate what excuse he gave for his default. But the Colour-Sergeant met her—in his birthday suit—swinging a jug of water, the water splashing like a fountain all around on the beds and floor.

Shack, who is nothing if not practical, went straight up to him and said :

“ Put that down ! ”

He did. She expected him to.

“ Now get into bed.”

This also he proceeded to do, in a very sheepish fashion. But he was out again in five seconds, got a chair and was proceeding to annihilate Shack, who he declared was a monkey, when the orderly rushed in and saved the situation. (For once, thank goodness, they—the whole caboose of orderlies—got called over the coals, for the Mouse had to be called up, and he didn't like it a bit, and said if the patient had not been allowed to get excited he would not have collapsed. In fact the Mouse turned into a Lion again—and roared. He also advised that if that patient died he would hold certain orderlies responsible. The orderlies trembled—manslaughter is a horrible word.)

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Next scene in this strange eventful history was the Officer Commanding the local Division, and the most beloved of England's Generals, coming to see him—he is quite a marvel this poor fellow, you know, one of this war's finest heroes. I happened to be on duty and led the solemn little group to the side of the sick man, an orderly standing to attention at each side of the pillow as usual, in case of accidents (he's allowed two pillows now!). I was glad of the opportunity of seeing this beloved General of all the Commands, and I thought how humble are the great ones of the earth. He knew that if that other hero *knew*, he would be glad to see the hero of all soldiers, and perhaps he guessed that it might rouse the patient, give him an interest that he should be acknowledged for all he has done. But the Sergeant was past that now; he lay muttering, muttering, his dry lips swollen, his wide staring eyes gazing ceilingwards; sweat stood in great pearly drops on his forehead, his hands were blue and cold.

“What? What does he say?” said the General of all England, stooping over the bed.

Just in time, the orderlies snatched the clutching hands back. Then came the snarling voice most distinctly, “I'll have that monkey yet!”

The Mouse looked at me and shook his head. I

## LETTERS

shook mine back, and the Commanding Officer, seeing these signs, shook his to the greatest of England's soldiers.

"So!" sighed the man of flint. "Still, nurse,"—he spoke to me, he who they say never addresses a woman. "You'll do your best. We can't afford to lose these brave fellows! So . . ." He sighed again and moved away.

Second scene:

Myself on night duty waiting for him to die, night after night.

For thirty-seven hours now the man has not slept. He *must* pass soon. Drug after drug has been tried, and had no effect. Yet before I came off duty this morning, the Red Cross man signed to me to come and speak to him. He had a simple draught in his hand and he said:

"'By faith——' try *once* again. Try that."

Half dazed with the weariness of night duty I went back: and mixing an extra drink stood beside the bed of our friend. It's quite hopeless, I thought as I looked at him lying gasping there, his restless eyes roving, roving; his tired fingers plucking the sheet—his head thrown stiffly back.

"Hello, Sergeant!" I called to him through his dim consciousness. "Here's the *longest* drink! It's your—mother, you know! *With a drink!!*"



## OF A V.A.D.

—“Alri’.”

“Now orderlies!” I whipped the medicine into his mouth, then the milk, and he drank—we have awful struggles always over this—then he bit the spout off the feeder, and gave me the contents of his mouth *back*.

“And that’s for m’ *grandm’*,” said he.

“He ain’t dead yet!” remarked the Cockney orderly pithily.

And I’ve come away.

And now I am going to bed—just too tired for anything on earth.

Your R. X. NURSE.

P.S. Some one told me when I got up that the Sergeant had slept all day. Can you believe it! I cannot yet. He slept all night too, and woke sane and wonderful this morning!!

No. “He ain’t dead yet,” and he ain’t goin’ ter die. Not he.

P.P.S. But he is so deplorably weak and feeble, and I do love him so. Like a mother, not like a grandmother!

## LETTERS

### LETTER XXIV

*July 30th.*

**A** GAIN no mail out last week, but two in. Delightful! Your letters are so much a part of you that when I read them you are here, alas! not in the flesh, but the essential, and spiritual, and intrinsic part of you arrives. And then I want to pour my thoughts back to you, only it is so very difficult to do so on paper. Thoughts are so tiresome to get hold of, to pin and write down, and make clear; but thank goodness we are so much of one mind, so much part of one another in all the essential observances of life that it hardly matters.

And so I would like to tell you the Colonel's story as he told it to me when we were out for our drive yesterday, and I want you to understand, and to gather from it as I did the integrity of the man, who could, when his honour was dragged in the mire, lift, cleanse and renew it, as he did, so that it could be worn again almost as if it had never been stained.

## OF A V.A.D.

Oh, how can I explain it ! The vision of a knight betrayed and broken, beaten and battered, who rises again with lance set and courage undaunted ! Bravery triumphant for the sake of two little girls who believe in their mother's fairness—the mother whom their adored father chose for them ! Yet the vein of humour ; hiding the hurt heart ; the kindness of it all ! How typical a British gentleman the man is.

He did not blame her in the least, nor once speak discourteously of her ; indeed, he related it all as if it were another man's story, and had its grotesque side ! It was inevitable, he said, since they had never loved each other, and somehow he gave me to understand that he had never loved at all, except his children. I always think that the Colonel lives in a land of dreams where Love reigns triumphant. How can I express my meaning ? He certainly does not use such words as these, yet he has used words before, like them, when describing games he has had with his children, which were packed with spirit presences, romance, fairies, gnomes, and picture words : yes, even more extravagant ones than these. He has taken his girls to pantomimes, he says, always ; and to see *Peter Pan* often, and the *Blue Bird* sometimes. He has been to these children, I quite imagine, a veritable fairy

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prince of a father, from their infancy upwards. Yet he is so entirely and essentially a soldier-doctor.

There are some people you do not have to talk to much, some who understand, with whom a glance, a sigh, a word tells. They are like music, these souls, full of wordless perception, of melody, of sound, of poetry, of the sea, or of distant hills. It is the soul that speaks to you, and you speak back—in silence. You are one of these, and the Red Cross man is another, and the Colonel another.

But to return to his story.

It is a sordid one enough in its essence, and hardly bears repeating, but it is interesting in one or two unusual particulars, and also that one knows the teller—the offended. The offender, in this case, I certainly should not care to know, and the offence is unforgivable, for it was not the first. It was forgiven once; and the Commandment does not go so far as to say that this particular sin must be forgiven “until seventy times seven,” thank God! Well, the Colonel married when he was a medical student; he had means; also a manor house in Scotland, though I am not aware that he is what you would call a Scotchman, or if he is a Presbyterian, because religion is the one subject about which we do not speak. A man seldom cares to discuss it, and in any case I do not think it interests

## OF A V.A.D.

this one, which is so often the way with those who have studied medicine. It hardens them, and then they lose interest in spiritual matters, from much healing and dissecting of material bodies. Science certainly seems to be rather an enemy of the "All Wonderful."

Our man, rather "fed up" it would appear with the idea of the usual matrimonial life and a practice, and very interested in "bugs and microbes," but without the fortune necessary to develop these propensities, and yet with sufficient to make himself and his family very comfortable in the Service, joined the Army Medical Corps, and went at once to South Africa.

His two children were born a few years after his return, and he had managed to make quite a small name for himself and get his first D.S.O., although he was only away for the last year of that war. But he was thoroughly unsettled. He blames himself entirely for this; he says he should have made himself stoical and patient, but the Colonies had roused a restlessness in him he could not overcome; and he applied for foreign service once more and went to Malta. For some years the children were too young to be left by their mother, but after a while she joined him, and then, as he expressed it, "the dish ran away with the spoon." It was a

## LETTERS

foreign officer; "she seems to have a penchant for gentlemen of that ilk," he said, "and they give the devil of a lot of trouble, too, for their ways are not our ways, and I did not want to fight a duel on either occasion, but on the first, alack! I had to, and that's where I got this scar." He showed me his right hand. "The fellow was thoroughly satisfied, having stolen my honour, and drawn my blood, so he took himself off, and left me with a repentant wife. Only she was not sorry at all, and I knew it, and she knew that I knew it. And she hated me for it. But she was extremely miserable, and I was heartily sorry for her, for the man had treated her disgracefully. My wife, like the bad princess in the fairy tale, grew more beautiful as years went on, and she certainly kept her 'end up' and behaved quite nicely for years. But when we were in Germany, some years before the War, where I was studying bacteriology, and so on, for Corps uses, it all happened over again like a very bad nightmare. Fritz would not let her go, and this time I would not fight, so left her there; and got a divorce. And now—well, there she is in Germany! Can you imagine a more horrible end? Married—or not married—to Fritz in Germany!"

The car drew up with a roar in front of an inn, and the others gaily got down and shouted for tea.

## OF A V.A.D.

I lingered to whisper, "Thanks—for the confidence you have shown me. I do understand and I am so sorry."

"Right," he answered, slipping off his gloves, and arranging each detail in the car in place as he does, so that it shall be there ready for any one to take in hand without any annoyance. "Of course I've never told any one else. It is a story locked away in an iron box of the law—but—I had a reason."

"What are you saying," said Fluff, coming behind and taking my elbow—"an iron box of the law?"

"One of my prosy stories, not worth repeating," explained the Colonel. "Come, let us investigate those flowers, aren't they lovely!"

They were so indeed. It was one of those beautiful gardens that you get in this country—in all countries perhaps—in the summer, blazing with blossom and perfume, lavender and rosemary, tea-roses, honeysuckle, lupin, cosmos, snapdragon and hollyhocks in wild confusion.

They brought us white milk, golden cider and purple native wines; dough nuts, wheaten biscuits and fruit—the kindly fruits of the earth indeed. Oh, a fairies' feast, in fairyland; and that was Paradise enough.

\* \* \* \* \*

## LETTERS

Why had the Colonel reasons ? I can't guess, nor shall I try, for perhaps they were none that really matter, and men say such queer things ! As a matter of fact I had forgotten that he had said that, until I wrote it down.

I sat behind with the Black man on the return journey, and very likely we won't any of us meet again for days, for such are our goings in this great Hospital camp, where each is doing his bit, working together as a great unit. I am entirely happy and well and hope that you are. . . .

Your R. X NURSE.



LETTER XXV

*August 8th.*

GROWN-UP people who are nice always retain a lot of their youth, do they not? For instance, the Red Cross man and the Colonel are both in their several ways like overgrown boys, especially here where they wear merely "shorts" and shirts, and socks, and shoes—and nothing else very often; for clothing has a lot to do with one's aspect in life, whatever you may say. When Criss-Cross, for instance, takes off her uniform, and dons a coat and skirt and "her hat," she becomes by her evolution "a sour old maid"—yet she can be so intensely human and delightful in the wards! Why cannot she be that delightful Sister-person outside them too—and make us all happy?

But the Colonel, like all boys, cannot realize that she "wraps herself about" in her mufti, and yesterday when he took us for a drive to see an old,

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old well which the Bible people built not very far from here, he became frivolous and quoted :

“Down the garden well  
Which the plumber built her  
Aunt Matilda fell—  
We must buy a filter.”

He was not poking fun at any one—but Criss-Cross was not at all pleased. He only said it because it was such a gloomy place in a wood, and we had shuddered. No doubt in the same way he annoyed his wife. I can imagine him whispering a doggerel from the same book :—

“Late last night I slew my wife,  
Stretched her on the parquet flooring ;  
I was loth to take her life,  
But I had to stop her snoring,”

when his heart was breaking ! Perhaps during the divorce proceedings. For humour is so mixed up with sadness.

Talking of sadness, a lovely boy died last week in my ward. A splendid wounded Sir Galahad. He never mentioned a woman in all his wildest ravings, not even his mother ; and he was “beautiful to behold,” and young. (How dreadful it is that it is the flower of England’s garden that seems to go

## OF A V.A.D.

hence, and be no more seen !) He much preferred the orderlies to tend him than that we should, and so until the end when he became unconscious once more, and asked for us we scarcely went near him. It was just at the end that the Red Cross man asked me to go to him, as he was asking constantly for something. No one knew what. Perhaps I could help him.

"If you sit by the bed," the boy pleaded piteously, "perhaps I could recollect. It seems to have something to do with my mother who died when I was a kid. You remind me of her," he added, and smiled.

"Is it a sister, then, or father, or brothers?"

No, he did not want his people; but he would like to see his C.O., only that was impossible and not what he wanted so badly. It was something to do with having been unconscious: and his mother.

"Was it some friend? A letter he wanted written? Was there a girl?"

Oh, no. He liked the "other fellows" tremendously, and there was no one else at all. "I never write to girls," he added; "I don't like them."

He was silent a long time after this, gazing with his large blue eyes wide open, at the wall opposite.

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He made an effort then to get up, but the Red Cross man stepped forward and held him back. He had been, you understand, very frenzied, and it had been necessary to use much restraint. He was not conscious of this, and he was much astonished at his own weakness and disability, and annoyed that any limitation should be put upon his movements—his gaze turned to the orderly surprisedly, reproachfully, then with all the formal coldness and hauteur of his race he said—

“I am your officer, and a gentleman. I merely want to see the trees and the sky—and you hold me down.”

“I’m sorry, sir,” answered the Red Cross man conciliatingly, and wheeled the bed over to the open window kindly.

Then the boy turned to me.

“Send that man away,” he said. “And I implore you, help me to remember!”

“It is about the trees and the sky,” I began: “a message about your home? Your horse? Your dog?”

“No! It’s mostly about the sky! It’s not quite that though; it’s about my other self. Not my body. It—it must be about my soul.”

Oh, what did the boy mean! We were very silent, and when I looked again his eyes had closed.

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So I slipped away, waving to the Red Cross man to watch, and flew to the telephone to ring up the Army Chaplain, for I could think of nothing else to bring him comfort to his soul.

I said, when I got an answer to my call, "Would the Chaplain come up to the Hospital at once, please."

"What for?" presently inquired the voice of the Chaplain.

*What for!* I thought of the little Roman priest.

"A patient needs you."

"I don't visit the wards, you know. It's the junior Chaplain's place. Leave a message at the entrance."

"But he may not come to-day! This patient is dying."

"Well—send an orderly for him."

"He might not find him. Can't you come? The patient is an officer; and he is dying."

"An officer is he! What regiment?"

"Cavalry: or rather on the H.Q. Staff at present."

"All right, I'll come."

Returning to the ward and slipping into my place again after this, I found that the boy had not appeared to miss me. He was muttering to himself quietly thus: "My soul passed through the window.

## LETTERS

It went over the trees. It will live in another body—not—Oh! God I pray—not a German . . . not a German officer. . . . Are you there, nurse? Please wipe my forehead. It is very wet. I had a horrible thought. . . . I am going to die, am I not? . . . Ah! silence means consent. My soul is going to pass. But not into a German soldier! I refuse solemnly and emphatically to pass into the body of a German. I am an officer and a gentleman belonging to the Army of His Majesty King George of England and . . . I did not get a V.C. did I, nurse? ”

“ You’ve been recommended.” That lovely smile dawned and went again.

“ Have I? Well, it does not matter now. . . . Tell me. . . . Oh! Christ, tell me, where I am going! That’s what I want to remember. To ask *where I am going!* ”

“ Look here! Would you like to see the Chaplain? ”

“ Whatever for? ”

“ You could ask him, couldn’t you? He could help you, you know.”

“ Well, perhaps he could. I’ve had dinner with him once or twice. He seems a good sort of chap.”

The Red Cross man soon signalled that the Chap-

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lain had arrived. So as he came forward I broke the news of his imminence to the boy.

"Don't leave me," he answered in a terrified voice, "and, do you know," he added plaintively, "I should like some one to hold my hand! If you don't mind."

So holding his hand on one side I sat, with the Chaplain on the other.

"Hallo, old chap!" greeted the boy with his ingenuous smile when he got his visitor focussed. This was so pitiful that even the Chaplain choked when he spoke. But he did not seem to know what to say.

"You wanted to see me," he said. "Can I do anything for you?"

"I'm afraid you can't," said the boy; "you see, I'm not a Christian."

"That's nonsense," said the other. "You've led a good life, and run straight, and are not ashamed of anything? Would you like the nurse to go away while you talk to me?"

"No, thank you, sir. She helps me, holding my hand; and I have nothing to tell you that I am ashamed of, as you said just now."

"Well and good. Would you like Holy Communion? I've brought the things."

"No, I would not. I told you I was not a Chris-

## LETTERS

tian ! It's—it's awfully good of you all the same. I am afraid my wounds have made me rather irritable. I'm sorry."

A dreadful silence reigned.

Perhaps because there was nothing else to do the Chaplain pulled out a Bible.

"May I read to you?" he asked. It was nice of him and his voice was husky.

"I should like that," said the boy.

So the Chaplain in his sonorous voice read, "In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I should have told you. I go to prepare a place for you."

The words were like snowflakes on a hot day—if you can imagine such a thing—for we were overborne and constrained indeed, full of tears and emotion. Our Lord's own words, tender, refreshing, infinitely gentle, relieved this tension as nothing else could have done, I think. "I go to prepare a place for you."

But the tears, which I could not control, welled in my eyes, brimmed, fell over; drop, drop they came splashing down on to the boy's and my clasped hands. He had closed his eyes and did not notice them, and the Chaplain did not, for he was gathering himself together for his departure, but the Red Cross man did. He tip-toed to the locker and got a



## OF A V.A.D.

large handkerchief of the boy's, then he tip-toed back and dried them for me. Such is the Red Cross man.

"Please turn me," presently said the boy, and we lifted him towards the light, and the sky and the trees. And so, clinging to my hands, he smiled once more . . . and died.

\* \* \* \* \*

This boy goes into my gallery of saints ; his picture called Sir Galahad. But did he see the Holy Grail in the Light ? Did he find peace ? At the grave—yes, Fluff and I went to his glorious funeral, much to the Sisters' disgust ; they said "it wasn't etiquette" ; but the P.M.O. had given permission, and I am so glad we went, for the whole camp turned out with their muffled drums, reversed bayonets and slow march. Even the boy's charger looked so sad, so sad, with the top boots turned the other way—they played the Dead March in Saul and then afterwards the Last Post. Ah ! how it thrilled through the wooded lands and up into the clear depths of the sky above ! The words of Maeterlinck came into my head : "There is no death." But knowing there is, I crept nearer to my companions—for now the whole of the Medical Staff had joined us—and I heard the Colonel murmur

## LETTERS

in his serene and tranquil quietening let-well-alone way :

“ Blow trumpet, for the world is white with May ;  
Blow trumpet, the long night hath roll'd away ;  
Blow, for our Sun is mightier day by day !  
Clang battle axe, and clash brand !—  
Let the King reign.”

. . . Oh, my heart is full. . . .

So good night, little sister,

Your R. X. NURSE.

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### LETTER XXVI

*August 21st.*

THERE has been more fighting on our front, and Criss-Cross has now been taken away to look after a temporary Officers' Hospital which has been arranged for by the ladies of a town not very far distant. We shall all miss her very much indeed, for she has that estimable gift which the costers praise so highly of being "always the same,"—equitable, calm and just. I hope the voluble ladies of this country will understand and appreciate her. Our Criss-Cross is so essentially English in her ways ; and unswerving in her attitude.

With mixed emotions on both sides, she told me that I must take her place, *pro tem*. I am a V.A.D. nurse, and there is some line of superiority over the Red Cross it seems, unfathomable except to the Mighty.

At any rate until a Senior Army Sister appears, it is now my duty to carry on the organization of

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the "Female portion of the outfit." It must always be uncomfortable stepping over others' heads, and particularly so is it with me, for I am not a good commander. I always feel that want of confidence in myself which is so "becoming in a woman!" and want to be such friends, so externally friendly with my co-existents! I want sympathy—I want love and friendship—but I don't get much here in any case. Fluff is nearer being my friend than any other, and she is undependable. Sometimes she is charming, sometimes she is chilly, sometimes she will become positively sentimentally demonstrative, and then not speak to me for a week.

Dear Fluff! When Criss-Cross departed, she came and vowed eternal friendship, and undying obedience; and then I took the opportunity of warning her of her intimacy with the Black man, and she got angry—she is so essentially feminine—and said very foolish, bitter and unwise things indeed. She accused me of "wanting him for myself," of trying to attract him! Heigh Ho! I won't repeat it, it was all so childish and foolish and untrue. I tried to take one of her hands to check her, but she snatched it away, so all I could do was to look at her in abject amazement, as she poured forth the torrent of her wrath, and then the unhappy girl suddenly burst into tears. Alas!

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she leant on my shoulder and confessed : " I love the Black man, I love him, I love him, and he is only playing with me ; and I don't care ! I don't care for anything in the whole world except the Black man ! And he does not care—not two pins, for me ! "

Poor Fluff ! I pitied her, and scolded her, and warned her, and admonished her. But what is the use ? She is a woman in love. There is no more to be said about it ; for a woman in love is the most unreasonable subject on earth, and quite beyond what the Colonel calls " un " -common sense.

Stock was quite pleasant about the matter : and the new ones do not count so much, as I have always been their senior. But Shack was extremely difficult. I had to speak to her about one or two little things. Long ago I should have liked to have spoken to her, but then I was under no obligation to do so. Now that I am, it has become hateful to me, but I had to do it, and she took it quite as badly as I had supposed she would. She had come to help me prepare the theatre for an emergency operation, long before the " Heads " departed, and she had omitted to sterilize the bowls, as the Mouse—who had become a Lion, and in spite of this—demanded. When he came in, for he had gone out while she was supposed to be doing it, he said,

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before he put his ligatures out, referring to the bowls: "Have you burnt these?" (He has methyated spirits set alight in them.) Shack, to whom he spoke, and who was responsible, did not answer, which he took, as she supposed he would, for assent. How I should have liked to have spoken then, but of course it was not my place, and I did not. But it opened my eyes, and since then I have seen that the truth is not in Shack. It seems quite an impossibility for her to speak it. And so—you see a nurse runs such grave risks. She might make herself responsible for a death; which to me would be the Great Horror, so I spoke to her—and it has done no good.

Are you ever extremely happy, and then a thought whispers: "Keep still, there is something here to bother you!" "No, I won't listen to it!" "But you must?" Therefore have I told you these worries behind the gladness of the days.

The Staff is delightful, and the work a joy, and also I have moved up to the house, and that is so comfortable, and luxurious, after the tent.

Immediately preceding this stage upwards, I had another week of solitary confinement. Of course I allude to night duty. How extraordinarily one is thrown upon one's self on "night." And *no one* even of those who have just come off realizes

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in the least how lonely the other souls get. Indeed, one does not realize it oneself after the first night in bed. Does one? How gorgeous that first night in bed is too! How one snuggles in!

The Colour-Sergeant is doing magnificently now—but we dare not trust him with a knife, or a razor. We don't want him to hurt himself, as he is very depressed and despondent still. However I am going to beg for these commodities for the poor fellow, and his orderlies can watch that he does not cause destruction; for he called me over this morning, but could not speak for sobs.

"What is wrong?" I inquired of the orderlies.

"It's that he is not allowed a knife to eat with," said the senior one, unemotionally (he is a very good fellow but extremely bored over this "special" nursing), "or a razor to shave himself with: and that we are looking after him."

"But these men are simply nursing you 'special' because you have been so ill, Sergeant," I explained, sitting down by the bed. "Besides, you don't eat with a knife!" I added gently, patting his shoulder and smiling at him sympathetically. "The orderlies do everything for you and cut up your food very nicely do they not?"

"Ah was brought up proper," he answered, recovering himself quite suddenly, "so o' course I

## LETTERS

do. 'Oo hever 'eard of eatin' cheese with his fingers ! It's on ratin's to-day, cheese is, and I'm that partial to it ! I can't tell you how ; they makes it at home somethink beautiful. My mother makes it out o' cream. But eat it without a knife I will not ! I do call it hard now ! Ain't it, Sister ? Wouldn't you say so yourself : 'orspital ratin's and not able to eat 'em ? It's 'appened Tuesday, come Fridays, since I know one f' the other, cheese and curry soup wi' sup in it ! " (Whatever that is ! ) " " Likewise with shavin', 'oo hever 'eard of a self-respectin' man havin' his chin scraped by a rumpin' 'ound like 'Erbert ! He scrapes, and saws, and 'acks at you like as if you was a bit o' tin, and he a tin opener. Nothink less than a monkey, he ain't ! "

" You never see the monkey now, do you, Sergeant ? " I said, answering the gleam of humour in his eye.

" Yus I does. I sees it continual in hevery grinnin' face around me bed, saving your presence, Sister—a hofferin' me food they've messed up with their 'ands, and pots o' tea, and such ! O Gude ! what would I not give for a clean drink o' sparklin' ale ! For this very moment as hever is . . . I'm a comin' on all of a tremble and a sweat once more ! " And he began to sob most pitifully again.



## OF A V.A.D.

“Come, lad!” I said, patting him still. “if it’s ale you want, you shall have ale.” (The Colonel had only said the day before in my hearing that he was to have any mortal thing he desired as long as it was safe. So far we are slightly nervous about his delusions, which continue. We are so proud of our Colour-Sergeant for condescending to get well, and we want him to be a complete success.) “And if there is anything else you want, you just tell me, and I will try and get it for you, or you tell the Colonel yourself, or the orderlies.”

“The Colonel! It’s not the likes o’ me would be biffin’ ’im on the shoulder, and a telling of him me wants! And them there blessed orderlies! what are they for but to get what I wants; not to go again me continual morning, noon and night, a keepin’ me from me pipe, me duds, an’ me rights.”

“Are not the orderlies nice to you?”

“Gude save them if they was not! Lor, Sister, what are you talkin’ about! They had better be anythink else to me! Am I not their Colour-Sergeant?”

As I left the ward the orderlies changed duty, and I called the senior one up to me. He is, I believe, a Devonshire Squire who is put on to this duty because he has conscientious scruples against being inoculated. He runs all risks at his own request,

## LETTERS

and I must confess he is abnormally healthy.

"Tell me what the Sergeant wants, so that I may write for it officially."

"First, and most of all, he wants a knife to eat his cheese and 'sup' with; next, that he may shave himself, and get up in his own uniform—he cannot bear the Hospital blue; and finally that he may not be 'put upon,' and thwarted by us. He is really a very difficult convalescent, is he not, Sister?"

I quite agree that he must be; but did not say so, only turned away to hide a smile and made a note of his wants. So that now he is getting his ale, and eating with a knife, and seems happier—though he will insist on asserting that the monkey has killed his grandmother, and that "it is a good thing too," so he is not quite safe, even yet.

\* \* \* \*

Perhaps it is loneliness of soul, or shall we say simply night duty, that made me think so much, so much more even than usual, of you this week, my sister. One night, for instance, I must have dozed off into a kind of sleep, though I was aware of everything, the place, the lamp, the book, myself. When snap—How can I explain! I stood up and cried to heaven: for it seemed that the silver thread between me and thee had broken.

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Perhaps I should have forgotten this, I certainly tried to, reading most assiduously the rather stupid novel that the Major had lent me—an exposition on the eternal and everlasting sex question. I am so glad that I am a sexless creature. . . . When suddenly. . . . Well, I was crying! This is what I had dreamt this time. For *most assuredly* I had dozed again.

It seemed that the desire of our hearts had come true. We had a farm and a beautiful home for little children. But I did not see the children. I was first aware of walking up from the farm through a gate into the park, and up a drive to the house. If I ever see that house again I shall know it. Before it stood a carriage and a pair of horses. The driver was on the box, and some man—a gentleman in a grey suit with grey hair—I do not know him—stood about waiting for *you*. I ran past them up the steps into the great hall—I shall know it again if ever I see it—up the stairs into your bedroom. You were there in a very fine new black voile dress, and you stood there gazing at me, and I at you, until you broke the silence by saying in your quaint and altogether delightful way:

“I want to be admired.”

I admired you, but there was something sad about you, a yearning. . . . I cannot explain, it was a

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dream, though altogether distinct, and then . . . You came over to me, and as you came my heart rose up to meet you. You put your hands on my shoulders and looked at me . . . how can I explain that look :

“Thou meanest what the sea has striven to say  
And yearneth up the cliff to tell.”

And you said :

“I am going to leave you.” And you kissed me and left me staggering there. But I did not call out. I would not show you that I cared, in my dreams. But when you had gone . . . I looked all round the room. . . . I should know it again, and went over to a chair, and wept . . . and woke.

*Now what can those dreams mean?*

\* \* \* \* \*

Just before I went on night duty, the Red Cross man also went forward with a convoy, so altogether things have changed a good deal since I wrote a fortnight ago. How quickly they do change during warfare. There is a battle, and one is taken and the other left, then the gaps are filled up. Indeed, like flowers in a field, we are here to-day and gone to-morrow. One day we have all the things the heart of man can desire, the next “naked we follow the naked Jesus”—how that phrase haunts me!

## OF A V.A.D.

But it is so when you look round on the poor tired faces of the patients in their cots—you realize that it is “naked” He would have you follow Him. Oh, how fine, and near to God the soldiers come, who through courage, through selflessness, and through pain, win through “to the hereafter.”

Perhaps I am a little morbid just now, for I went to the graveyard this afternoon to see if they had put up the little white cross over my Sir Galahad. Oh! those crosses! Those rows and rows of little white crosses!

It had been raining, but I deliberately slushed through the long grass in the Park in my strong service boots and short uniform skirt, to get the full freshness thereof. Oh, the green was luscious, the air crisp and sweet, and the sky clean and fresh with its dappled zephyr clouds! All too soon, I reached the low stone wall and clambering over it at the right spot, dropped straight down into the graveyard. Two Australians were there cutting words on the cross of my White Knight. Bob, it was, who had outlined the words “Pax vobis,” whilst Jack the Corporal, sat on the wall whittling a stick and superintending matters. They stood up and saluted when I appeared, which gave me a queer little funny feeling inside me, then sat down again and went on

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with the work in hand without any comment. I thought perhaps they would rather not speak; so I wandered on reading the words that here and there had been cut in the wood of the crosses over the heads of "most dearly loved" comrades.

"He died for freedom's sake." "God will accept his sacrifice." "Only Good-night." "A hero asleep, Good-bye, dear brother." "Too far away thy face to see, but not too far to think of thee." "He fought for honour, and for right." "Another hero gone to rest, to sleep for ever with the blest." "For King and Country." "Asleep." "No truer friend than this." "He died as he lived, a man." "A brave and manly lad at rest, his duty nobly done."

What a world of love and regret in each little sentence!

There were flowers here and there on these graves too. Wild flowers scarlet and blue, cottage posies, loving little bunches of forget-me-nots, and chains of daisies. You know how sick it makes my heart when wreaths and crosses are sent from florists to pile on graves! It's such a pagan, foolish idea, for no one sees or heeds them, except the florists and undertakers perhaps, and so entirely wasteful. I shall never forget going to father's grave after he was buried, and standing there gazing upon the

## OF A V.A.D.

piled-up dead and forgotten flowers. It seemed so sad to waste sympathy and sentiment and money in such a way. Could not some other use be put to it. Some gift be given to a Church, a Hospital—a beggar perhaps, to bring gladness to a sad heart, in memory of one who had passed!

But this was, oh, so different! Surely each dying flower was thrice blessed with love and kindly thoughts: each tiny stalk when picked had snapped with prayer and benediction! But it was sad in the graveyard. The rows and rows of narrow mounds, and little crosses made and issued by order of the Government, with nothing on the majority of them but numbers simply marked in black. Was not this one of the saddest and most hopeless sights on God's earth!

Was it? Little white crosses in their entire and naked simplicity, what do they spell? "Therefore doth my Father love Me, because I lay down My life, that I *might take it again*. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."

"That I might take it again." Ah, how we are entwined with our Saviour. What deep intuition is this, what instinct, that turns the hardest, vilest heart to Christ—in the face of death? Surely *because Christ died*, that we might live. "Therefore

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doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again."

The only way, I am beginning to think, in which the human soul can "win out" and reach God is by renunciation. Renunciation cleanses, strengthens, purifies and raises, not only each soul, but communities, nations, peoples and kings. It is so difficult to be patient, to understand the value of suffering, the use of failure, the need of pain, but He knows. He lived, He suffered. He did not want to die the cruel, shameful death. But He faced it. He died; and He rose again.

"A little while and you shall not see Me! and again a little while and you shall see Me . . . and your hearts shall rejoice; and your joy no man shall take from you."

Your R. X NURSE.



LETTER XXVII

*September 7th.*

SUCH splendid news the double mail has brought this week! I always seize upon your letters first, and hug them to my heart. But this time it is another letter which has lifted me above earth. It is from my friend Miss Alice Kelly, who wrote to thank me for doing my best to find her brother.

After I had read that part I came to this—it is I who put in the italics—“His wife and little *Jess* and the twin boys are all well. But the mother is oh, so sad, and woebegone. She seems to live in the old place in a sort of maze, for she does not understand anything about managing an English estate, or English servants, or tenants. I think that the names of her father’s and poor old *Tuck’s* places are enough to give you an idea of their remoteness—‘*Waga Waga*’ and ‘*Coo-yoo-pooyer.*’ . . .”

My dear, I got so far, and simply danced with joy.

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Then I read more ; about his having been a wanderer ; trying Canada : and tea gardens ; and so on, until finally he had met the girl he married, and settled in Australia ; so it is my man ! It is Tuck. Terence, Cecil, Urquhart Kelly is the same individual as No. 28, Casualty Ward, Field Hospital '88, etc. How near he has often been to being found—and how far ! How excited I am still ! And oh, the joy of telling him ! He did not believe it at first.

“ Tuck ! ” I said, going beamingly to his side—he is sitting up now—“ I’ve found you, Tuck.”

“ I can’t believe that ! But you wouldn’t tease me, nurse ! Have you found Jess as well ? I don’t want to be found if there is no Jess.”

“ Oh, you funny person ! Of course you do ! But there is a Jess and there are . . . hold your breath, Tuck, there are twin boys as well ! ”

“ God save us ! Where did they come from ? ”

“ Your wife found them under a gum tree, of course, after you were home last time ! And there’s more to come. So hold your breath again, Tuck, and swallow it all at once. You were in Australia : for the matter of that, you were in Canada too, but now you are to go home to your own country. You’ve come into the property. Do you remember the great white house you spoke about ? Well,

## OF A V.A.D.

that must be Urquhart House, where you often visited your grandfather when you were a boy. He has died, and your father and all your older brothers. Which does not matter at all, does it? since you cannot now remember them; and history does not say you were particularly fond of them. But you loved your sister Alice, and you must not forget to go on loving her for my sake, as well as her own, she is so fond of you, and a great friend of mine, and the dearest creature on earth!

“Now I know I am bewildering you, Tuck, but I will leave you her letter to read presently, so that you can unravel the riddle all by yourself, if you will just try to remember your name very hard, whilst I say it slowly to you. Terence—that’s why I repeated it to you so often before—Cecil, Urquhart Kelly.”

“T-U-C-K!” shouted Tuck suddenly, “with the C tucked into the wrong place! Now I remember, Sister! Lord God Almighty, how we laughed when we found that out! I remember my brothers christening me in the pool in the Park! . . . It’s all too good to be true, isn’t it, Sister?”

“It’s not too good at all, for there is no mistake about it. You are ‘all found’ at last, No. 28, and I for one am heartily thankful!”

Before I left him, he made this quaint remark—

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"Fancy having to get to know your wife again! I hope she is nice—but little Jess! I shall know her quite well."

"And they will know you," I added. "All but the boys. Fancy being the father of twin sons and not knowing it! How happy you will be!"

Mischief sparkled in his great black-rimmed eyes, set so pathetically in his gaunt face.

"I never heard of any one being glad yet of being the father of twins!"

Poor old Tuck! We have cabled home, and had an answer already, and now that this cogged wheel has started to revolve, I hope that it will go on revolving smoothly and pleasantly, and somehow I feel sure that it will.

But why! oh, why, why, was he shut away like this for all those weeks?

\* \* \* \* \*

I had just left Tuck when I ran into the Mouse looking very excited.

"Sister!" he called. "Two motor ambulances of wounded have just come in. Will you go down to the surgery and give a hand to the new nurse? I will send for the Major too. I'm going myself to choose some needles. Just get on with them as best you can. You know how."

So they all trust me! which is so nice of them.

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Four poor broken Tommies lay on stretchers waiting attention; they had had morphia and were dozing, and quiet—till we touched them—so we started with the simplest till the doctors came: a fracture. Poor white boys! They tell their stories often, to drown their pain, and we let them, for there is something divine and healing in sympathy, and they feel it. The Red Cross man used to make odd little remarks beginning with, “my son,” which, as a Scotchman says, “they like fine,” but I can only let them hold my hand, if it is free, and smile at them. Poor dying cold wet hands! How they cling! I could weep over them. . . . If only one could give *life*.

Yet one is allowed to heal! Our Lord gave that gift to some of His people. I have felt myself soothe; I have seen Criss-Cross quell a demented spirit more than once, and the Red Cross man bring sleep. I have seen more than this, and experienced it too, but it won't go into words, and in any case you know all about it more than I.

The first patient, then, that we undressed and put on the table was one of Kitchener's babes, an officer of barely twenty. His arm was badly fractured, and this worried him, but that beauty had been torn and mangled mattered not at all. A great flesh wound divided his cheek somewhat, and had not altogether healed, just enough to make

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it extremely difficult to dress and stitch. He talked quite freely in spite of this drawback. "Let me talk, for God's sake," he pleaded, "and get it off my chest. I lost my head and ran right forward. The others swear the order was to stay, but I did not heed them. Bullets were whistling round, and I wanted a dug-out we had been getting nearer and nearer from early morning. I ran and took it, but no one followed—and it was empty! So I stood up on top, and got this whistler in my cheek. It knocked me down too, a long fall into the trench, and broke my arm, and when I crawled out, and tried to get back, our fellows had gone. I don't know where they got to, for I tramped a long way back, then lay out there all night, and got up and trudged about all the next day till at last the fellows here with the Red Cross van found me."

The Major coming in soon took this youth in hand, and as he bent the broken arm I heard him exclaim, "That regiment! It is miles and miles from here!"

I write this pointless story because it came along.

The next to go on the table was such a terrible sight that I cannot tell you about him except that it made me curse the Kaiser.

And then he . . . he opened such blue eyes and said in the sleepest voice, "It's worth it all to get

## OF A V.A.D.

this handling : It's heaven, I'm wrapped in cotton wool now, and floating in ether. . . . I had a terrible time before. Thank you, Major."

"You are a brave fellow," said the Black man softly. "Next, please !"

The next two were Australians.

"We're pals, me and him," said the one who could talk, eagerly. "Don't separate us, there's good souls. We've been together all along. Joined up too, we did, in the same battalion. We are jocks, jockeys, by rights, but I done a crook ride, and he stuck by me ! I'm a bad 'un, but he's as white as snow, so save him, Major ! If I'm took, it'll be a bad end to a bad life, but by —— don't let my pal die if you can help it."

"Here, man !" to the Mouse, who was straightening him out, his leg was dreadfully broken and had been badly mauled since (I was to learn how later), "keep your hands off my leg ! That's mine that is, and don't you forget it ! Oh . . . ! Lord, Nurse forgive me ! My mother . . . would not mind . . . God bless her. . . . Did you tell me to keep quiet ? Can't, and that's straight ! Oh . . . . .  
. . . "That's my Maker ! . . . Who said it wasn't. What ! take that . . . smothering stuff ? Not me. I'll bear it. Here hold on a minute. . . . .  
. . . . ."

## LETTERS

He had fainted—if he had not I should—so he took his chloroform without resistance. His leg was too awful ! And you've no idea of the colour of his face.

His pal was unconscious, but the Major went to some trouble to “ put them in ” side by side, so they will be all right and quite happy, please God, when they wake up.

Then, who do you think I found sitting in the porch ? The Red Cross man. He had a sheepish smile on his face and a bullet wound in his foot. The smile is due to the wound, he is awfully disgusted about it. He insists on just having it dressed, and putting on his boot over it, so that he may go on with his usual work here, and the Major is going to arrange for it so. We are so deplorably short handed.

\* \* \* \* \*

Oh, little sister mine, how tired I am ! But happy except for longing for you.

Good-bye.

R. X.



LETTER XXVIII

*September 15th.*

THE patients have been pouring in again in torrents, since the fighting that began again in deadly earnest last week. They arrive, poor boys, in floods like rain after thunder in the hills.

The Red Cross man, in spite of the wound in his foot, insists on continuing his work, and hobbles about Casualty with the new nurse from the Base to help him. I wonder if he whispers those wonderful asides to her, and if she hears. She is a nice person, very pink, and clean, and dignified and sweet. But does she hear him, and if she hears does she heed! Does *she* wonder if his vocation should be that of a navvy—I am thinking of his prize fighting—or that of a priest, with his “My son, it is more profitable, and more safe, to conceal the grace of devotion. Do thou cheerfully perform what lieth in thee according to the best of thy power and understanding—it belongeth unto God to give and

## LETTERS

to comfort when He will and how much He will, and whom He will—as it shall please Him and no more.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Quite an adventure happened to me to-night. “Isolation” is becoming a distressingly big block; tent after tent is run up, but until now we have had no diphtheria cases to contend against. However, unhappily one or two mild cases have lately shown themselves, and the Colonel unearthed a tracheotomy outfit this morning and gave it to me, saying, “Put it all in readiness, Sister—as a mascot. So often if all is ready nothing happens” (though last night proved the contrary), “just as prevention is so much better than cure.”

So I sterilized the things in the surgery and placed them in readiness in the neat little apparatus, at the same time making up my mind to visit Isolation just before I turned in for the night. One's days are so very full, and Isolation is almost a day's march through the Park, though it is connected by telephone, as all the tents are, so that one hardly ever goes down there. There is no Sister in charge there, but on the whole the patients get on very nicely all the same. If it had not been for this little incident I certainly should not have gone that night, for it was so unusually pitch-dark and

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raining when I set out. We are not allowed lanterns, of course, and lights are shaded everywhere as much as possible, because of the evil abroad in the sky.

It was rather hateful having to plunge into the darkness alone, instead of turning into one's comfortable quarters, but virtue was soon rewarded by the deliciousness of the night. It ceased to rain and the garden was yearning sweetness, with heavy scents, and dripping trailing creepers. I love a garden after rain, even in the dark, and with clogged boots ; but I do not love stumbling in the dark, and was glad when a figure loomed up in my path that proved to be the Major coming up from the wards, and who offered pilotage.

I was heartily glad to accept his proffered help, and he said that he might as well see the sick men too, though he had already injected them with serum—and none were promising to be bad—four hours ago.

He took my elbow to guide me as I stumbled now and again in the gradually lessening darkness, and we had a very pleasant little walk down to the tents after all, for the stars came out, and the moon, as the clouds cleared ; and it grew fresh and exhilarating like new wine.

We parted at the tent where we put on gowns

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over our uniforms, and I went in search of the orderly in charge. I found—the Cockney one. How, I beg to relate.

You must understand that it was alone that I came upon the deplorable state of affairs that I am going to describe.

Directly I put my foot into the Receiving Tent my heart began to patter, for I heard that terrible, choking, snoring, unmistakable spluttering sound of a diphtheria case *in extremis*, and I gazed round, hunting. The first two beds were undisturbed by their occupants, who lay comfortably asleep after their respective injections of serum, and breathing easily. But No. 3! It was chaos. The blankets were on the floor, the counterpane was clutched by piteously contracted hands, the pillow was being sat on. Poor patient, he was cyanized and throttled, his eyes starting out of his head, his case desperate! He was conscious, but dying. You know how quickly it can come upon them. And the little Cockney orderly lay asleep on a mattress which he had pulled on to the ground, by the side of this patient! My kicks took what seemed an eternity to rouse him, and then he sat up and rubbed his eyes dazedly.

“The Major is in No. 1 tent! Fetch him at once,” I said, “*At once.*”

He fled with alacrity—but came back!

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“Don’t tell on me!” he dared to plead. “I’ll go like a streak if you won’t tell on me, Sister.”

Distracted, I said, “Anything! only *go!*”

And even while I watched the patient fell back, and the breath departed out of his body. So once again since landing in this infested country did I desperately perform artificial respiration, by Sylvester method.

At last the Major dashed in, and I left the helpless body and whisked open the parcel of instruments.

“Lysol,” said the Major, lifting the lifeless figure of No. 3 on to pillows so that his head fell back and exposed the throat—“And go on with the breathing exercises.”

Lysol appeared in a dish in the shaking hands of the Cockney orderly, who is as quick as sin when he means to do anything. And—before you could say Jack Robinson the incision was made, and splutter, bubble—“Look out!” cried the Black man.

The obstructive mucus shot into the air, the tube was inserted, the feather twirled, and the man breathed freely and came round.

\* \* \* \*

“That was a near squeak!” said the Major, gaily washing his hands in the tent still, when all was over. “Now what in the name of all that’s

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holy is that mattress doing on the ground ? ” His eye had quite suddenly fallen upon it.

The orderly grovelled, and I held my tongue. I had promised to do so.

“Were you asleep ? ” he asked sternly.

“Asleep, sir ! Me ? Cut me throat if I was. It all come on sudden like, just as the Sister came in. I dropped the mattress as I run for you, sir.”

“Come here man, outside, I want to speak to you ! ” What happened outside I know not. I suppose he just gave instructions, though it all looked suspicious enough. But orderlies are so valuable.

\* \* \* \* \*

A sudden sense of loneliness as I waited came over me, as it must come to patients who lie awake in tents like this in the night. It seemed to be suffocating with its drab hanging walls and roof and no visible outlet for air. The oil lamp smelt a little and had a red ear which smoked now and then, and the other patients slept heavily. I went over and turned down the flame, and back one of the tent flaps, then returned to the patient and bent over him. . . .

The patient smiled at me contentedly. He did not feel this loneliness of soul perhaps, yet he had

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been so near the Great Passing, which we must all do alone.

"It's all right," I whispered, "you'll be all right now! No, don't try to nod, just sleep. See? Sleep. You are so tired—so sleepy. Close your eyes. . . . You are quite all right, you know. Sleep."

He did all this, and I slipped away and met the orderly at the door.

"If he dies!" I whispered, "I'll have you court-martialled. Understand?"

"Yes, miss. I'll do my best, miss. I'm sorry, really I am. It won't 'appen again. Thank you for not telling, miss."

The "Miss" shows how upset he was—the little reptile!

I do not know when so many moods have succeeded each other in my mind as they did that night, for I could have killed the orderly, given my life for the patient and hugged the Major in quick succession. Now I was to feel extreme exasperation over a small matter.

I was particularly pleased with the Major, he had acted admirably, indeed with a joyful alacrity beyond comparison, and he was in the highest spirits, as we both in the disinfecting tent washed and cleansed our hands once more.

Now comes the first state of exasperation, not

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that I was really angry, though I had to seem so (to be strictly honest I should have rather loved it if it had not been for Fluff, though I assure you that I had given him no encouragement), for he had the audacity to suddenly stoop and kiss my cheek, and simultaneously I thought of Fluff and flushed deeply crimson. He thought it was anger and turned away, and I went with my hands still wet to the telephone and rang Fluff up, for I remembered that she would be on night duty—sitting alone on the wooden chair by the wooden table reading the stupid novel with her soul in that wooden state that night duty gets it into. And we had not told her of our little adventure with No. 3; indeed there had been no time! But she would never believe this. With the Black man too! It had been as quick as a birth is, at the last moment. Had it not been like a birth! So akin are life and death.

Fluff insisted on starting off at once to come to Isolation, for she is very conscientious about her work; and when I looked round the Black man had departed.

Fluff was not in the best of humours. She went to inspect the scene of adventure, and returning approved of the patient; she said he was asleep and that the orderly seemed very much alive. Then came the question which I was dreading.



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“ Which doctor ? ”

“ The Black man.”

Oh, the awful stillness on the face of Fluff, and then the storm !

She always knew ! I had done it on purpose ! There had been no need for an operation, for look at the calmness of the patient already. How *dared* I inveigle the man into operating without telling her when she was on duty. How had I got him down here ?—And so on.

Oh dear ! Oh dear ! how loathsome this all was to me ! I cannot explain it to you. But you can jolly well guess.

Again there were tears, again apologies, again a confession.

\* \* \* \* \*

He *is* a lovable man, and he *has* paid her attention, and so on, but what am I to do about it ? I am so sorry for her—and I do like them both, and wish with all my heart that they could come to a satisfactory agreement. Women, they say, are difficult to understand, but I think that it is men who are, in their dealings with women, for they make love to them whether they love them or not, and what are the poor things to believe ? Fluff, for instance, loves the Black man, but does he love her ? He pays her great attention, yet why to-night did

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he kiss me, and disappear when he heard me ring her up?

I was exasperated, as I have said, with Fluff, but I was angry beyond measure with the Black man now. How dare he kiss me and run away! My cheek burnt. I felt guilty, or as if I had done a very foolish and unwise thing—when I had done nothing at all to be ashamed of.

Poor Fluff! After we had walked up to the Hospital and she had gone back to her nook for the night, and I trailed through the yearning garden to my diggings, my heart went out to her. The average woman does not want to work for her living continually. She craves for love, marriage and children: for dependence and protection. When she gets them certainly she is seldom entirely satisfied; but in her heart nearly every woman desires these things. Fluff, like thousands of others, is giving the best years of her life to work for the nation, for patriotic and very noble reasons, but what she desires deep down within her, is a home, and a husband and children to care for. Poor Fluff! What if the Black man should turn his back on her after all! What a cad he is, to be sure! But is he? After all he may not be. No, certainly he is not one of nature's most courteous gentlemen, but he is essentially a *man*, and a "fine figure of

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a man " at that. How queer we all are ! And how odd the world is !

Here am I stealing the hours for sleep by writing to you ; that is queer too. But I had to tell you " all about it " before I went to rest.

Good-night, my darling.

Your R. X NURSE.

## LETTER XXIX

*September 25th.*

A NEW Territorial Regiment has just joined us straight out from England. It is going forward almost at once to fill up the gaps. But it paraded this morning for church ; and when " they beat upon their drums," I choked. For as they marched, it was borne upon me what valiant boys they were, so pale, and slim and gallant, so ready to do and die, so out of step, so wobbly in their lines, and so stiff. And their officers seem to tumble over themselves in their efforts to appear used to the game ; boys, too, stooping forward with their unbearded chins thrust out, and their bodies held as though clenched in steel. Heroes in their way, every one of them.

After them came their opposite poles, East and West ; and Antipodes following after. The Gurkhas first, little sinuous brown men almost as broad as they are high, with thick stockings and thicker

## OF A V.A.D.

boots on their square feet and massive legs. Shorts, dirks (or kukris) in belts, little square service jackets: ugly upon the whole past imagination, yet with pleasing round bronze faces under their enormous wideawake hats. They tripped past at their short double; line on line of taut brown iron, absolutely trim, and drilled, in unison and tune with their weird bagpipe music.

Next came the Australians and New Zealanders—giants on the whole, braw, firm, steadfast, and grim. Loose long strides they take, but in step, hands and feet swinging to the music of the band, brown boots, thick brown puttees covering legs almost as fine as their smaller brethren—whom they love much. (The Gurkhas and Anzacs fraternized in a marvellous degree at Gallipoli. No one quite knew why. “Little brother.” “My-big-brother-from-over-the-sea.”) On they came: “Cornstalks,” “Crow-eaters,” “Gum-suckers,” “Sand-groppers,” and all, under their Southern starred Union Jack flag.

One hardly realizes how brave and splendid our dear fellows are till you see them with the drums, so modest, so silent, so brave and free and natural, and so near the Heart of all knowledge and of death.

\* \* \* \* \*

There has been a lot of fever lately amongst the

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local country folks. It has not affected us very much, still it is such a pity, for these poor folk seem to have no one to take care of them, and they are suffering much hardship from living so near to the Front.

The little Catholic priest was admitted during the week, and I was astonished to find that he is a soldier and has fought in the trenches, but has been so wounded that he was discharged. One can hardly believe it.

Another of the same Order has taken his place, and he also has fought and been wounded. How extraordinary that some nations should compel their priests to fight. I said to the new one, "Is no one exempt?" He said (he speaks more fluent English than the other)—

"But—in our country no one is."

"You priests! Do you mind going?"

"Mind?"

"Do you take the carbine willingly?"

"What would you? It is obedience."

In spite of his serious air this one is very young—under his beard—and his eyes are merry. How can he look merry after the long boredom of a monastery, followed by Verdun, or Ypres, or Gallipoli?

And the first one—ill in the ward of Stock at present, and quite off his head—he always looked

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happy too, and seemed contented. He was always so full of sympathy for others, soothing the afflicted, tending the broken-hearted, quelling the delirious. Working away in his own peculiar manner, morning, noon and night. Always preoccupied, always silent, always busy, in and out of the wards, round about the camp, up and down to the village. No wonder he got enteric. Surely he will gain much merit!

✓ How many will gain merit? How patient the world is!

It was my afternoon on duty in the wards and I was delighted to find Tuck, looking most genial and contented, wheeling about O'Shaunassy, who has a quiet look of happiness these days too, since he is going home "along with him," though where he is going when they reach home he's "not knowing at all." I left them out in the sun, and took a chair at the table in my old ward Casualty, and began toying with the report when the two Australian jockeys whom I had admitted a week or two ago, who are in the beds next to the table, began talking. They were speaking of the battle, and I begged them to continue in spite of my presence. One seems to be quite an educated man, but the other, whom I have not heard speak before, rather stupid. I wonder why the first one is so devoted to the other.

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He seems to explain and tell him everything. The dull one was saying he longed for peace.

"Turkey," the other answered, "is not a bad enemy, as we know by experience, don't we, pal? Peace with her might be all right, but Germany is awful! And she would be worse as a friend. None of us want peace without honour, and friendship with her would be nothing less."

"Talking of friendship, chum," the other went on. "You saved me in that last fight we put in together, didn't you? I've got one up against you again, haven't I, old man?"

"You have not. It was that Red Cross man belonging to this unit saved you, and he saved me too and the whole outfit—him with the bad foot—also one Gurkha. Didn't you know?"

"How could I know, seeing I've been 'conscious like for days."

"Cheer O, then. There goes for a yarn. Do you mind, Sister? You remember running out and hollering along with the others and with me and sawing, and chipping, and plunging and hitting when we got there? Well, in that hell, the two of us fell. . . . You know you were saved a lot, mate, by being unconscious. The fear that is worse than death is lying waiting to be killed. It's worse than the most horrible physical agony. It deadens



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that!" He got white as he spoke, then fell silent and his face was very grim. We did not interrupt his thoughts and presently he went on, speaking at first with an effort, in his usual cheery vein. "But I'm going to pass that by. . . . When I come to it was pitch-dark, and then that awful lightning came, and thunder; crash, crash; boom, boom; and then quiet again. I calculated I was in the middle of a bad night fit, and I tried to move, but me leg was doubled under me, broken horribly as it proved. . . . I found me water bottle and had a drink; and then it grew awfully still and silent, and I said me prayers. They made me cry! And it was a great sort of relief when I heard another groan not far away in the dim of the night. 'Mate!' I whispered back—to the dark. 'Mate!'—not a sound answered, though I listened like a 'roo which is hunted, and then that hell's crashing began again. . . . as suddenly it was horribly still, and then I knew that some one else was listening! . . . Oh, how I wished this was an afternoon nap and I would roll over presently and wake to find the bookies bawling, the crowd chattering, and the horses springing on the turf. You know how I often take a spell before a race, and drop off to sleep for five minutes? But no such luck! There was no mistaking the thunder cracks when they came

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again, or the lightning flashes ; or the similar feeling of cruel elements in me leg. But the groan ! Well, I might have been mistaken in that ; or it might have been a German anyway, and no use to me—so I kept still. Suddenly I gave an awful start and all of the blood rushed out of me head. I felt dead, just as I had wished to be, previous to this. The fear of rushing and plunging into battle with your pals beside you and those hell's fiends rushing and tumbling back at you, or even the other feeling, is nothing to what I felt then. Me hair stood on end ! For a Thing had passed over my face. Light and alive, and black it was, like nothing on earth that I could remember, and I wished again and again that I was dead. ' It's bad 'nuf to be wounded and die in agony on the battlefield,' I thought, ' but to be tortured with gnomes and fearsome graveyard things before you're dead is worse 'n 'ell '—I wished I hadn't said me prayers. Then a flash showed me a little black fellow standing in the ditch beside me with a bloated face and a huge cocked hat. ' It's the ghost of Australia,' I groaned to meself, and hid me face. I lay quite still and bit me tongue almost in two. Then he spoke and I did not understand a word . . . but it was like heaven smiling. ' Why, it's a Gurkha ! ' I said. ' Gurkha,' he says, kneeling down and

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grovelling over me. He felt me hands, arms, and body, and then he felt me legs and found the one doubled up, and he chortled when he found that I wasn't hurt in any other way. He then twisted me out straight, as if I was a corkscrew, and when I come to from that, he hoisted me on his back, and was going for home like winking. It was then that we fell in with the Red Cross man, a stretcher and two other fellows. . . . The Sergeant made to grab me for the stretcher, but the little man gets him by the arm and points out towards whence we came. He was a game little chap, and plucky to the end ! . . . He saved my life then and there again, chum, or was it the Red Cross man for being present ? Anyway a bullet got the little Gurkha straight in his heart as he stood there, and he crumpled up like a concertina under me . . . my word that hurt . . . and they left me there beside him while they went to find what he'd tried to point out. That was you, me Lord Harry—and they brought you back on the stretcher and put me on the back of the Red Cross man till Jones got hit."

" Jones ? "

" Yes. He was carrying the head of the stretcher and went down next, so they left me and him together this time and you goes in. And then the Red Cross man fetches us two in one by one—and

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this time I felt his blood wetting me horrible, for he was hit too. That's what I shall never forget. Wounded, you understand, the Red Cross man single-handed saved us 'one by one ; and then he saved the dressing station."

" I did not know his head was hit," I put in from the table. " Are you quite sure about it? It was his foot."

" Quite sure ; it was his neck" first. He's got it now under his tunic. I was covered with his blood. It spoilt my tunic and his too. If you don't mind I'd rather not speak about it. It—gets me goat as the Canadians say, for he won't let us put in for ' Distinction ' for him. He says he's got the only medal he wants, and no one knows what that is."

" Well, go on."

" The order came through after that to shift—and we shifted. That is, we tried to. The thunder and lightning were terrible after we got in. The brutes tried to get us, and the hut rocked as we left it. We had only got about a hundred yards down the ruts at the back of the bank under which we had taken shelter when a ' screaming Kate ' got the foremost horses. And it was mud. There were three wagon loads of us and the front one stuck up, obstructing the road in the gorge. Out beyond where the bullets was whistling and raging were some

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horses wildly scampering about and yelling mad, and the Red Cross man he just went out and catches two of them, one after the other, and helped the driver harness them into the cart, and that's how we got away, somehow. That's how that honourable man got his scars. He's one of the finest chaps I've ever met."

I could not bear any more ! I wanted to find the Red Cross man and shake him by the hand, and tell every one how wonderful he is, and how modest and noble. But then I knew that he would not like that. I feel that all he cares about is whether God cares ; for surely tribulation brings us very near to God, and he seeks it. How tiresome and painful it must be to have a wound on your neck, and another on your foot, and go on doing all your work in a coarse tunic, and with ammunition boots on your feet, and get no credit for it : and no rest, and no praise, and no thanks or acknowledgment at all ! It is the little things that count for comfort and are so difficult to bear. How wonderful he is !

Good-night, my dearest.

Your R. X NURSE.

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### LETTER XXX

*October 8th.*

WHAT a day of happenings this has been. But you shall have events as they came to pass. First of all then, I woke up with that intense sense of joyfulness that lives with me now in my waking hours. The clear sweetness of the morning air flooded my room ; in the tent there is always a stuffiness, a smell of trampled earth, of damp, and slightly, of disinfection—but up here it is glorious. The room is large and wainscoted, the furniture old and valuable, the bed huge and comfortable. There are large windows which I keep open, and from my bed I can see the tree tops which wave languishingly, softly, for ever to and fro, in sunshine or in rain, in moonlight, starlight, or in storm. They are silver beech, I think, and near to them is one old dark leaved, but utterly green foreigner ; in this the birds have daily a chattering early morning scramble—it must be full of grubs or nuts, something that they eat, for they flock here morning after

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morning—a blue jay, a pair of brilliant yellow birds, some magpies, and some linnets (it would take St. Mars to say why they do not eat each other). But above all am I amused with a tiny pair of peevish black and white darlings quite new to me. Says one, “He kist m’,” “He did kiss m’.” “He kist m’,” and the other shrilly arguments “Susie hit m’,” “Susie hit m’ first.” “Susie hit m’.”

\* \* \* \* \*

How I am keeping off the mark. And I am so tired and want to go to bed so much—my bed in the tent. Yes, I am in the tent again. This is how it happened. At breakfast, behold! the Bloodless One walked in! No one could have been more surprised than I. Had a train then arrived? She was in uniform—and I went forward at once and saluted her respectfully. She did not see my hand. She glared at me with fishes’ eyes—cold, wide, insolent

“Good mornin’,” she said in a voice that made me feel ice trickling down my back, she was rolling her r’s badly. She always does. “You did not expect me.”

“I’m sorry. No. We have had no intimation. Are you very tired? Were you travelling all night? Will you sit here——”

“I will sit at the head of the table. I am the

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oldest Sister in the Service. I have come up to take charge. Why did you ya'rn ? ”

“ I beg your pardon ? ”

“ Why did you y'arn ? ”

“ I was not aware that I yawned. Perhaps I sighed. I am sorry ! ”

“ In any case you will refrain from it when I am present. Surely you are not tired. It is I that am tired after two nights and days in the train, and in any case I would not ya'rn.”

Fluff here attracted my attention and I sat down by her : she was choking. When she recovered she drew a rapid sketch on her cuff, of the Duchess in *Alice in Wonderland*, which she made to resemble in a remarkable degree the Sister who had just arrived. Her hand she placed with the sketch staring up at me beside my plate. Fluff can always do these things undetected.

The other day in the Theatre after an operation, when we three were alone, I saw her with a guileless smile dust a yellow daisy heavily with iodoform, and then holding it between her fingers daintily, go up to the Mouse, who adores her, flirting with it gently.

“ Give me that flower ! ” he begged, not knowing its vile secret and in spite of its proximity certainly still entirely unconscious of it.



## OF A V.A.D.

"You can't wear it. What's the good?"

"I'll wear it till I meet the Colonel if you will put it in my button-hole."

Naughty Fluff! She fixed it cunningly, and he sauntered off, turning at the corner to wave his hand. Then he stooped, lifted the flower and buried his nose in it.

The poor Mouse! His loathing of iodoform is a standing joke in the Hospital. And this must have gone disgustingly all over his face, and his clothes too! Poor Mouse!

\* \* \* \*

Well, we hustled the Bloodless One off to her room (my room) directly she had "eaten of a sufficiency," and I did not see her again until after tea. Then I was sent for to the office—my office it had been up till then—and she wiped the floor with me!

I wonder if you have gathered from my letters lately how extraordinarily happy we have all been. Really the nurses have had beaming faces, and everything has run on oiled wheels. The administrative qualities of the Colonel have always been in evidence all through the Hospital. His neatness, his conciseness, his bland tranquillity—are a power undreamt of, when combined with absoluteness of control. Let-well-alone, in spite of his nickname,

## LETTERS

wears an iron glove which does not leave much slackness in his dominion, so that for my part I have found it delightfully easy to carry on during the absence of a Senior Sister.

But I have been disillusioned ! The Bloodless One gave me no chance. She began her attack at once and left no means of escape, for whenever I attempted to answer she held up her hand. I kept on repeating to myself, " We must love our enemies and do good to those who despitefully use us," and I wondered why God allowed some natures to become so poisonous ; and whether it was wrong to realize that they were so, or whether we should insist that certain persons were perfectly right and good in some marvellous way, although they have apparently nothing holy or lovely to draw upon. But then one would be an arrant humbug. And all the time I grew more unhappy and uncomfortable and wanted with all my heart to give back as good as I got : and then that wonderfully illuminating text of St. Paul's flashed and quivered in my brain and kept me still ; " There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man ; but God is faithful, and will with the temptation also make a way to escape that ye may be able to bear it." She began by saying that the nurses were out of hand (she had not the slightest foundation for this accusation since

## OF A V.A.D.

she had only seen them at breakfast-time when they are supposed to be off duty) and that everything—sweepingly—was in a muddle.

I pointed out that the Inspector-General of Hospitals had been completely satisfied, and that also the P.M.O. and the rest of the Staff were. But she waved me aside. She said that the patients had been allowed too much licence under me (the patients have done so well too, and almost stopped their eternal grumbling): and that the orderlies had become insolent. This was too much! I burst forth that I had not noticed it, which was proved exceedingly foolish, for she proceeded to tear me limb from limb about them. She said that they were not rude to me because I was familiar with them, that probably I paid them (I have not the least idea what she supposed I paid them for), that Society ladies had no business to come out and do the work that hardworking honest women had spent their lives in acquiring skill at (it would have been useless to tell her that I was no Society woman but a quiet and inoffensive country doctor's daughter); that they—the Sisters—had taken every certificate it were possible to take, except a death certificate (she dilated on this, which was rather clever of her). She said they began the struggle (of acquiring certificates) at school—or was it at birth—then in

## LETTERS

Hospital ; and oh, how she piled them up. There was one from a dentist, but before that, for birth, for social reference, for domestic economy, for health, for massage, for midwifery, for electricity—I am afraid I am muddling them terribly, but I felt as Alice in Wonderland must have felt when the pack of cards was thrown upon her ! I heard through this amazing summary of certificate-talk, that upstarts like me came and took the credit from more worthy women, the medals off their breasts, the bread out of their mouths.

I could not bear it. I fled. And so has she burst my bubble !

\* \* \* \* \*

I was flying still from this interview, holding my fists taut with anger, choking with indignation, smarting with injured pride, trying to get away to my own room to have it out with myself, when in the corridor I ran into the Colonel. I tried to slip unnoticed past him, but he took my elbow, turned me round and ran me into his office on the left. Then he shut the door and faced me.

“What’s the matter ?”

I tried to laugh, but it was a piteous attempt and I said nothing—as one does. But I thought stupidly—

## OF A V.A.D.

"What does this mean? I can bear no more!"  
But I had to, as I was soon to know.

"There is something wrong! I have never seen you look like this. You are as white as paper, and as black as ink round your eyes. . . . My darling . . . I love you—and you are going to be my wife, and I won't have you upset like this. . . ."

I was in the Colonel's arms.

Sister, I rested there. I put my face on his medal ribbons, and I sobbed my heart out. Dear, when people are sympathetic, when people are kind, does not that break you up more than anything else on earth! It does me. I did not think of any consequences, of anything else but the entire comfort of those protecting arms. You believe that, don't you? I was suddenly done, and utterly weak, and beaten, and broken. I had done my best and failed; and here were strong, brave arms protecting me and a heart beating with love for me.

It was when he kissed me that I came to my senses.

"My darling," he said, again and again. It was honey to my gall. Then I pushed him away and laughed. He laughed too. He looked oh, so happy and delighted, like a great schoolboy. I have wondered since why he looked so happy since he had broken his own iron rule of reserve and mine of decorum. . . .

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Suddenly I was filled with horror at our present situation. What if the Sisters knew this! If an orderly came!

"Open the door," I begged, and stepped over to the table. Like an innocent child he did as he was bid, and only just in time, for the Red Cross man appeared to light the lamps. Somehow I felt guilty before him, for it seemed to me that he knew what had been happening behind that door and that he condemned. Well, it was no business of his.

"And the trouble is," said the Colonel, who had seated himself in the chair, glancing at my red eyes, as if he were bound to explain them—"The trouble is that——"

"Orderly, with regard to the Sister who arrived this morning, see that she is being made as comfortable as possible in the Senior's quarters. Nurse will return to the tents at once."

"Thank you," I said when the orderly had gone. And then fighting with emotion, since I could not dash out directly after him, and fidgeting with a ruler, I said, for something to say, "He is wonderful, is he not, the Red Cross man? I think he knows."

"He is undoubtedly sane to madness," smiled the Colonel. "But he is an excellent fellow, and it does not matter if he does know. When can all the world know? When will you marry me?"

## OF A V.A.D.

"Oh, Colonel, don't ask me that. Don't say that. I never thought of it at all. It's quite impossible."

"What nonsense! You——"

"It's not nonsense. This must be as if it had never happened. A wash out. It never happened."

"But it did." The Colonel looked astonished.

"It was bound to happen sooner or later. I love you, and you will learn, if you do not already, to love me, simply because I care so much, unless——Is there any one else? For God's sake don't say, there is. No. Well, that's all right. You belong to me. I'll claim you soon, but I will give you time to think about it. I did not mean to rush you into it like this. But! That Sister upsetting you——"

"Listen. I cannot marry you. I cannot. There is no need to discuss it. . . . I refuse to discuss it. I cannot marry you, that is all!"

"You cannot put me off like this. I won't be put off. I am not put off—you understand? I love you and I want you, and presently I will claim you. Meanwhile, I'll go on loving you—and you must try to learn to love me."

"I cannot love you! I must not. You are *married*. I tried not to say it, but there it is. How can you marry me since you are already married?"

## LETTERS

I literally could not bear any more now, and I fled once more. Down the corridor, down the stairs, out into the garden, down to our Lady's Shrine, where I had meant to weep alone—but my tears were dried. I was smiling, an intense joy filled my frame—but what business had I to joy?

Oh, whence comes this tremendous happiness which envelops me to-night? I am not ashamed. I am glad the Colonel took no notice of my protestations. It was lovely to be loved, embraced, kissed. Have I sinned? Have I done amiss? I don't care. To-morrow perhaps I shall begin to fight. I am too tired to-night. I shall go to sleep and dream of strong arms holding me, of ribbons pressing on my cheek, of the smell of khaki, and tobacco and soap: and sink sublimely in *dependence* on the Colonel's breast once more.

Good-night,

Your R. X NURSE.



LETTER XXXI

*October 15th.*

**I**T was all very well to write as I did last week, and to tell the Colonel to treat the episode in his office as if it had not happened. I can think of nothing else! Why did it ever happen! I am distracted. Why do women's hearts rule them so? Do I care? I don't know, but I do know that I have got to find out where I stand in relation to the Colonel, it is no use trying to shut up, and close down like a box. I cannot make it a "wash out" as I pretended. Has he? It is a week ago now since it happened, and not by a lift of an eyelash has he shown me that he does. Yet when I am near him I am aware of him. My heart rushes out to him, questioning, questioning. Do I love him? I do not think so. I do not know. I will not let myself. He is married. Sister, he is *married*. Yet he took me in his arms, and I allowed him to, but that was

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simply because I forgot myself for two or three stupid minutes, and I am quite sure that he was not responsible at the moment either, and therefore—finish ! Yes, that would be sensible ! But feelings will not be put aside in this brusque fashion. Feelings will die a natural death if neglected, no doubt, they will become annihilated by violence also in time, but they refuse to be put down with contempt, or undue velocity ; they are much too urgent, and important, and tangible to most of us poor mortals for anything of the sort, and it's nonsense to say to the contrary.

Perhaps if it were only my own feelings that I had to think about I should not sit here writing about them, for I object most strongly to giving myself away, but I have become conscious of having stirred up the same emotions in another person, and I do not know what to do about it.

\* \* \* \* \*

What an extraordinary thing it is, this consciousness of another's personality, that knowledge that one's soul has another plane here below, where one can meet other souls, piercing, as it were, beyond materialism, and sporting in mysterious fairy fields of friendship. Here it is always fair ; sunshine and rain are both as sweet ; it is full of sadness, yet joy

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abounds ; and peace and good fellowship are there for ever. Yet it is not heaven. It is the place where music and humour, books and friends take you ; as do the beautiful sights of the earth, and innocent sleep, and the contemplation of God. It is the place of happy souls.

\* \* \* \*

It is not then to this place that this new relationship with the Colonel has brought me, rather has it led us away from there where we always met before and brought us to a stupendous and perilous brink of sighs and tears ! At least for me. Ah ! What am I to do ? If the Colonel meant all he seemed to mean, where will this end ? Ah ! *Now* and *here* it *must* end. So, little sister mine, pray for me ; for I cannot get away, and I must end it. . . . But how ?

To-day when he passed through the Surgery, where I had gone for some " dressings " for my new ward, our spirits rushed out and met in a sort of glorious tumultuous ecstasy. Dreadful—but true. And we passed and made no sign, for the Senior Sister was with him, and the Red Cross man with me. I was horrified, and amazed and indignant—" I love him," I said to myself. " You shall not," my other self repeated, and they fought violently.

## LETTERS

"You shall not" wins. But what is to be done meanwhile? How am I to explain to him? What am I to do? How can I get away alone with him to have it out, or . . . can I run away?

The answer to the last question is easy enough. I can't. It would be ridiculous and cowardly to throw up this work because. . . . Because of what? Am I afraid of the Colonel? Am I afraid of myself? . . .

And then suddenly in the surgery, with my hand covered with grease and my face burning, I became aware of the Red Cross man. Were my emotions so obvious that he had seen them like printed words on a sheet of paper? He was not speaking to me. He was not looking, nor had he looked since the Colonel had gone; he had in fact just finished "dressing" a patient's foot which was held by a junior orderly. The orderly was wrapped in the contemplation of the intricacies of bandaging. But I was quite suddenly aware of the intentness of the Red Cross man, his thoughts were with mine, he had knowledge of my state of mind; and he was displeased. Imagination? Perhaps. But he slapped the scissors into lotion—he shook the towel, which he lifted so that it cracked; and he most curtly addressed the orderly. The orderly jumped

## OF A V.A.D.

and hurt the man's leg, the man groaned, the orderly expostulated. Never before had the Sergeant been known to "grouse" unfairly; it would be told all over the camp, and it was my fault. No, but indeed it was not: How dare the man be so rude and ill-bred as to use his powers of perception to pry into my mind! But had he? Yes. I was sure of it—and then I remembered that he had come limping into the office on that auspicious occasion. He *had* noticed then! And the Colonel had said it did not matter. Neither did it. He was silent—he was reserved to a degree—he would never betray one. Though why should he care enough to have this power of discernment. Only those who love enough can see through the curtain of another's soul. . . . No, the Red Cross man does not love me. I should be very surprised to hear that he had ever loved any one. It is only every one that he loves, and essentially God. He never condemns, so why should he be so angry with me? I have seen him so gently tending the men who are suffering from sins—drugs, drink. God! how these things tear at a man—but the small things, he blazes over those—bullying, jealous spite, unkind words of another—he will never help a "prideful" soul. Is mine?

But what has the Red Cross man to do with me?

## LETTERS

Little sister—

“Dear and great angel . . . . .  
    . . . . . I would rest my  
Head beneath thine, while thy healing hands  
Close covered both my eyes beside thy breast,  
Pressing the brain, which too much thought expands,  
Back to its proper size again . . . . .”

Your R. X NURSE.

## OF A V.A.D.

### LETTER XXXII

*November 1st.*

**T**HIS has been the most unhappy Sunday I have ever spent. It began well enough. The sunlight was as golden, the sky as blue, and the air as clear and silent as it can be only on Sundays all the world over. I had arisen and had my coffee with the others as usual. There was no forecast of any impending tragedy, except perhaps in my heart, which was heavy within me. I had not been to early church, as it was my Sunday to take the Reports and go into Casualty to do the necessary dressing, which as I have told you are at a minimum on Sunday. I had finished the "Reports" and the "dressings," and was sadly temporizing over Casualty, which you know I have left for a ward (one by one the puppets, too, in my little show are being swept away; Tuck, O'Shaunassy, and the Colour-Sergeant—all those whom I most dearly love), when my eye fell upon a little group of Australians

## LETTERS

coming across the Park—I knew them by their hats—carrying a stretcher shoulder high.

I was cleaning the silver forceps, and I was saying over to myself as I did so, perhaps because it was Sunday morning, “With all humility and meekness, with patience supporting one another in charity and brotherly love,” when——

I felt cold quite unexpectedly, and ill. And I turned round and watched the door—I could not move. Somehow I expected the Red Cross man to walk in with one of his impassioned greetings, and stare at me—a thing he never does. And I *could* not move. . . . I grew colder and colder each moment that he did not come, and more aware of him. My heart grew like lead, and my hands like ashes, also I knew that my eyes were fixed, and my mouth a little open—but I could *not* move. With an indescribable longing I longed for life to appear at that door, for—at last—he seemed to come in and stand pitifully gazing at me. He was whiter than dust, with patches of crimson dyeing his clothes . . . and then I became aware of words ringing in my head ; “Who are these . . . clothed in white robes ? . . . These are they who are come out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes and have made them white in the blood of the Lamb. . . . They shall no more hunger, nor thirst



## OF A V.A.D.

. . . and God shall wipe away the tears from their eyes. . . . ”

The Australians at last opened the door. . . . They swung in, lowered their stretcher and lifted a burden on to the table. It was the Red Cross man.

I was still gazing dazedly, fixedly, at his lifeless body when Jack, the Corporal, came to me, and broke the news in his amazingly simple way. I cannot describe this to you. He seemed replete with sympathy—yet he said very little. On the other hand he seemed to say a great deal; he told me everything in so few words. He seemed to realize my lethargy, to try and rouse me out of it, and to understand it :

“ He was a white man,” he said, “ and we also liked him, fine. He was a brave man ; he gave his life for his friends. It was a mule wagon stampeding that took him. It was rushing into the middle of the little Gurkha natives who were at breakfast. He caught his wounded foot in something when he got hold of the frightened mules’ heads, and he went down under their feet. He stopped them, but the pole got him in his side ; and he was all but dead when we disentangled them.

“ The Surgeon —— ”

“ The Major has seen him. He came at once, but

## LETTERS

it was all over. He told us to bring him here and to stand by to help you. He said would you . . . You know ! ”

I was standing by the side of what remained of the Red Cross man now, holding his hand, stroking his head. . . .

“ Did he say anything—before he died ? ”

“ Yes, he said queer words. They were so queer that I recollect every one. I’ll get Bob to put them on his cross. He said first, opening his eyes and looking up. ‘ Stars fell from Heaven.’ Then he turned on his side and whispered, ‘ I am but dust, but I have eaten the Bread of Angels,’ and died.”

“ He said that ! ”

“ Just that.”

“ Was he conscious ? ”

“ I don’t know.”

Silence reigned supreme now, for the Australians had crept from the room. I had to pull myself together, so I put my hands, that felt like ashes, under the tap, and splashed water into my burning eyes. At first I was afraid to turn back, for I felt that Presence with me still, but with it some of those old sayings came and heartened me at last.

“ With patience supporting one another in brotherly love.”

I turned swiftly and began gently to touch him,

## OF A V.A.D.

putting his head straight, closing his tired eyes, supporting his steadfast mouth and chin. He was warm, like a little child asleep. "Except ye become as a little child" . . . as he had now. All passion, and suffering, and pain had departed. How white he was, almost as if he breathed, and how utterly, utterly helpless and still. Why need I feel afraid? Tears fell, and fears fled. He was good, you *felt* he was good. You *knew* he was good.

There was a horrible wound to tie up—like our Saviour's wound in his side. I thought perhaps he would be glad of that if he knew . . . and the coat to take off those helpless shoulders. That exposed the scar on his neck which the jockey had spoken of. Healed now but unmistakable. Brave Red Cross man!

Round his neck also was a scapular medal. ("The only medal he wanted.") It had not been there that other time at the Base, when I had tended him. He was a Catholic then! . . . That accounted for a good many things, the Latin: the "Imitation": the self-effacement perhaps; his aversion to my love for the Colonel . . . he knew then! . . . and he knew that it might lead to marriage which would be no marriage in his Catholic eyes. Oh, Red Cross man, pray for me; if you can. . . .

The scapular should be left on. O'Shaunassy

## LETTERS

had told me that ; and also that it were good to put the beads in their hands. I found the beads in the coat pocket. Nothing else was there. The disc, then, would be the only thing to send home ! Who would mourn him there ? A mother ? A wife ? Perhaps children. Ah ! who can tell ! He has always been shrouded in mystery—now the greatest mystery of all shrouds him for ever. “ Let Light perpetual shine upon him.”

All the other garments had been removed now, and Jack, and Bob the Australian, came in with a shroud in which we wrapped the long stark figure. How gentle the hands felt, even in death, as I clasped them over the rosary, each tapering finger so white and chill. . . . One of his ammunition boots fell with a thud to the floor ; iron bound it was and heavy as lead.

“ Why did he always wear them ? ” said Jack, lifting it up. “ The other orderlies wear light shoes, rubber soled and easy.” Then, perhaps answering himself, “ Just consistent with his whole life. It was ‘ King’s regulations.’ ”

“ Lord, if thou seest it expedient for me, and approvest it to be useful, then grant unto me that I may use this to Thine honour,” said I, quoting that which I had so often heard our hero say.

## OF A V.A.D.

“ Yes, sure. He was a white man.”

\* \* \* \*

Yes. He was a white man. A white man indeed in his Army shroud, straight, stark, well knit and strong, with his countenance set in the awful white purity of death.

“ Until the desire of the everlasting hills shall come.” He said that once when we had reached a journey’s end worn out in body and mind. It was on a station platform, I remember. There were hills. . . .

My tears flowed freely now. It did me good to cry, and I was not ashamed of tears in front of the Australians. Had not this man been with us since we left England ; always gentle, always helpful, always kind. Demanding nothing, expecting nothing. Ready with his cheery smile and quaint maxims, through all the hardships, the terrors, the difficulties, the weary, weary months. Ah, God, why had he been taken, and others, so much less useful, left.

\* \* \* \*

The little French priest came in later. He seemed to flutter in at the door when I had done, without knocking, without speaking. He knelt by the long straight form under the sheet, turning it back from

## LETTERS

the heavenly face. How waxy it was now—how peaceful, how sweet !

“ When the desire of the everlasting hills shall come.”

“ Padre,” I whispered, “ is it all right—with him, I mean ? Is it *all right* ? ”

He turned his little suffering face to me wonderingly. It was twisted, and I knew then that he loved the Red Cross man. “ He was in grace,” he answered. “ He was returning from Confession and Communion. God knows best. It is we who suffer.”

I crept away after that, so that he could say the prayers in peace.

Eternal Rest grant to him, O Lord.

Your R. X NURSE.

LETTER XXXIII

*November 9th*

THINGS are not happy with me just now, are they? And now your short note has come, in that fateful envelope addressed by some one else, telling me you are ill. I am desolated. Oh, I think one of the hardest things to bear in life is to be away from one that you love when they are ill. When they want you, perhaps, and you long to rush to them and be with them, and pour forth your love to them in silence, and unselfishly for once, since Love is the greatest healer of all.

And so you see I want to come straight, straight home to you, and see you and be with you and get you well, and never think of anything else, and I should never leave you again to come to the uttermost parts of the earth to seek adventure, but stay beside you, like Naomi with Ruth, for ever.

You see I could so easily come if it depended on myself, for a great unrest is upon me and I have

## LETTERS

so distinct a disinclination to face the immediate future. I have got, sooner or later, to face it, however, and to have it out with the Colonel, and the idea grows more and more distasteful. Oh, why did he destroy our beautiful friendship! How tiresome men are! Perhaps it is the shadow of that that overwhelms me. That, and you being ill, and the Red Cross man, and the patients whom I love, who are departing.

Then too the constant, persistent little worries count just now more than they used. The Bloodless One is more trying to work for than ever. Fluff seems to be cut off from me, and Stock and Shack have their own little corners of amusement when they are off duty. A little while ago no one would have dreamt of arranging for Sunday afternoon without me. But of course it is my own fault entirely that I am left behind; because I do not care. If one cares for anything enough one can get it. I am sure of that. But I do not care. I feel like an Anzac hero who had just missed a coveted medal. He said, "There ain't much in this 'ere war for us blighters! I ain't agoin' ter grouse. I came in me socks and so if I go out in 'em, I've not lost much, however down on me uppers I may be. Still—I would 'a' *liked* the medal."

After all it is the same with me. I came in me



## OF A V.A.D.

socks and I'll go out in me socks (only they are stockings).

Still "I would 'a' *liked*" to keep me bubble! Reputation is after all but a bubble, and no one likes being "bust." I have enjoyed being a big iridescent blue and yellow bubble most tremendously, so "I ain't agoin' ter grouse." I've had that; and many privileges still remain.

All this is about myself, and of you I am thinking, and wondering, and worrying all the time, and for you I am hungering. So . . . since writing is so unsatisfactory, I will go to the little church in the village and say some prayers for you.

10 p.m.

I want to tell you exactly what happened at the church this evening. Oh, if only I could *come* and tell you. What did it mean?

The little church was empty this time, as it was later than before when I visited it, and I suppose they had had their service, for it was heavy with incense and very quiet. Shadows came down and crept round the font, veiling the Stations of the Cross, softening into mellow tones the blue and white Pieta. The great west door was closed, but the little one to the north stood open, letting the golden light of the setting sun flood the sanctuary.

## LETTERS

Its beams flashed on the Tabernacle. I broke all the rules of the Church of England . . . and adored.

Then came another vision. When these come, creeps upon me a kind of awe. It is indescribable, unutterable. I become alone in the midst of a congregation. (Once I was with you at St. Alban's. I had been struggling with myself as to whether or not I should leave you and join this outfit. I could not decide. But I had to decide. Then I just saw our Lord as He was when He was crucified. His arms outstretched, His head bowed—and these words of the Imitation beat like great clappers in my brain, "Naked follow the naked Jesus." That is why I so often repeat them ; I do not know why I never told you this before. Indeed, perhaps in the rush and flurry of having made up my mind, and the departure, I forgot. So it is with me, the inestimable gifts of God are showered upon me and I forget Him who sent the shower !)

Kneeling with my head bowed I prayed ; and then—out of immeasurable distance Our Lady called, and I looked up, and behold ! above the Altar she Herself appeared surrounded by all the little babies' faces that I have ever known to die. Only their little cherub heads appeared, for they were in clouds, but Our Lady stood without the clouds, and held out her hands with Something in

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them. It was the Body of her Son—but not as a child, not as in the pictures that I love so well, in a living body, but as the Host. (Oh, how can I explain, for I should never have imagined such a thing.) “Take eat,” she said.

In wonder unspeakable, I lost myself. . . .

So now whatever comes, whatever I have to do, to lose or gain, go forward, or go back, rise or fall, I shall know. . . . “Take eat.”

Your R. X NURSE.

## LETTERS

### LETTER XXXIV

*November 18th.*

**Y**OUR letter saying you were better came. That has lifted a load from my mind, but not the desire to return to you.

It is now weeks and ages since the Colonel told me he loved me, and I cannot bear it. It is so unfair! He should not love me. He must not. I feel like a rat in a trap. I must get away. Have you ever—have you ever tried to live near a person who loves you? It's bewildering. It's delicious. It's paralyzing. Yet I have never spoken to him, not once alone. I am sure that I do not love him—but do I? My whole nature cries to go to him: that is passion; and we are such good friends: that is love. Yet I want to get away. I want to get away *and be good*, and never see him again.

What an extraordinary thing love is! The poor little Cockney orderly has been hit by it; even he

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is not exempt then. Oh, he has been hit so hard ! I am so sorry for him.

He came to me one morning, clutching a letter in his hand, his face the colour of cream cheese.

“ I’m goin’ back ter the Line ! ” he snapped viciously. “ I’m goin’ back to me regiment. I’m goin’ ter kill some of them Boches.” (He pronounces it boshes.) “ I’m goin’ to ’ave their blood. The swine ! The filthy ’ateful ’orrible swine ! ”

“ What’s the matter, orderly ? ”

“ Don’t horderly me—I’m disorderly. I’m undone. I’m all of a ’eap ! Oh ! m’ little biby ! m’ Maria ! m’ moke ! Strike me stiff, Sister ! I’m undone.”

“ Whatever is it, Hiles ? ”

“ It’s a Zepplin bomb, that’s wot it is ! It’s done me in ! It’s struck the barrer ; and me all. Oh, Christ ! me biby ! I am undone ! ”

He handed me the crumpled grubby letter and staggered to a form, as he whipped out of his pocket a dirty handkerchief. “ Read that,” he said ; and hid his eyes, which had burnt into mine like hot coals. I was glad, for I could not have borne them for much longer.

Poor Herbert ! His letter ran thus :

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"DERE ERBERT ILES,—

" This comes opping to find you well as it leaves me at precent thank God but not so the missus please God try to bere it dere Erb for a bomb come down on the barrer and wilks and house next door and berryed the lot. They found the body of Maria all crushed and broke and she ad the biby in er arms as yer would ave wished. The moke was alive but they killed it as er back was broke most cruel.

" They gave them a butiful funereal outter the Mission—not outter the Parish as yer would av wished. The flowers were butiful—there was a gate of vilets, a cross of lilocks and a hankor of lilles all most butiful as you would ave wished.

" dere Erb I am

" yours sincer,

" MOTHER."

So Herbert Hiles has gone to the Line. And the others, Tuck and O'Shaunassy and the Colour-Sergeant have departed too, en route for England. My parting with the two former was not dramatic. We all smiled happily: I was so glad with them that they should go. But with the Colour-Sergeant it was different: it was in this wise. He came to the ward and sat in a chair, which he hated doing.

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But he is too groggy on his pins to stand for long, so he had to. He looked very solemn and remorseful as I came up and tried to be cheerful, and polite, and conventional.

*Me*: "Well, Sergeant, have you come to say Good-bye?"

*C.S.*: "It would not be my place to cum and say that to you. I've cum to say ha' sorry I was to 've called you a munkey, for they says as I did. Though I don't know as ha' I ever did that seeing it was me mother I would have thought o'."

*Me*: "It does not matter what you called any one, since you have been so kind as to repay us by getting better! But you did not call me a monkey or anything of the kind. You *saw* a monkey though, all the time, did you not Sergeant?"

*C.S.*: "I did so, a gibbering and tormenting with the face on him of the gude General."

*Me*: "The General came to see you."

*C.S.*: "Ah knows."

*Me*: "What else did you see when you were so ill, Sergeant?"

*C.S.*: "I saw me mother! And she—she was wi' me all the time. I should ha' died if it had not been for she."

*Me*: "God bless you, Sergeant,"

*C.S.*: "And the same here." I grasped his hand.

## LETTERS

*Me* : " Well, goodbye, good luck, and a good voyage."

I moved away.

*Orderly* : " Why didn't you say what you came to say, Sergeant ? "

*C.S.* : " 'Cos I should have cried."

Bless his heart ! And so should I.

Well, I hope they take care of each other, the dear things. They will, I am sure. Tuck and O'Shaunassy, for instance, have struck up the weirdest sort of friendship. From the start of things Shan has helped Tuck mentally beyond compare. Then when Tuck got up he helped Shan physically : so balancing matters. Tuck is looking quite splendid now and his memory is almost completely restored. The Mouse is delighted with him, and O'Shaunassy keeps smiling like the sun. He is to go to some very special Park Home of the Duke of Norfolk's at first, and then Tuck is going to take him on, if that can be arranged.

Talking of friendship, did I tell you about the General and the drummer boy ?

The General was in a small room off my new ward in the plank building, and the drummer was jealous because he considered that the General got more attention from the Sisters than he. "'Oos 'e !" he used to say. " Naught but a body sick like me



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—give us a drink, nurse, and don't 'urry oop f' him."

The General also used to be jealous of the drummer boy.

"Is he so very ill?" he would ask politely. "Pray do not leave him if I call until he is quite relieved. I can always wait. We are all of the same calibre when we are ill, after all!"

The climax came when they were both convalescent. The General condescended to play backgammon with the drummer boy, who won the cause three times running without any compunction.

"Arn then 'e lifted the ole caboose, arn 'it me o'r th' 'ead wi' th' lot," related the bewildered drummer; "arn all the draughtses fell on th' floor, arn I 'ad to go down on m' knees arn search f'r them."

My dear love,

Your R. X NURSE.

## LETTER XXXV

*November 23rd.*

**Q**UITE suddenly like a bolt from the blue arrived an official-looking envelope from the Base last week, which contained a communication bidding me to report myself at Headquarters as soon as possible. So I caught the train going down, giving way to one who had come up on it, so that we did not have to "double up" as before.

How quickly one can pack in an emergency. How quickly one can cut the ties. I said good-bye to no one, merely, as it were, saluting the Staff, and departing. I wondered if there was a gleam in the Colonel's eye! That is all. . . . But action puts a stop to all trivial thoughts and inquiries, and before I had realized that I had started, I was here, had reported, and been told to await the pleasure of the powers that be.

What has happened! Only the Mighty knows. I feel like a child who has been shut up in a room

## OF A V.A.D.

and told to make up its mind to confess a fault it has never heard of, for there is something forbidding, as well as foreboding, in the official letter with its typewritten words, and it is so annoying to be told to wait.

However, I enjoy sleeping as I never did in my life before, and my meals enormously when I wake up. Indeed, I have done nothing but sleep and eat for several days now, so that my brain is in a somniferous state, and I can think of nothing at all. I wonder, as I write, if the things and persons belonging to my late life can ever take shape and become facts once more ! Will they ever have any power to please, or to hurt again ?

\* \* \* \* \*

They always quarter us in this big hotel at the Base, where we were before. It is very comfortable, but barren and lonely on the whole, in spite of the fact that all the world comes into the huge vestibule to meet and have tea, and so on. There are groups of chairs and tables, with ferns and flowers and papers about, a bar in one corner, and a great tropical conservatory leading out of another. It is an extraordinarily restful and pleasant place, and one should not feel lonely, for I know my way to all the jolly places now, the Zoo, the Park, and the sea front, where the sea glitters and undulates

## LETTERS

to and fro, and flaps, and gurgles, and sighs for ever. Although it is winter time it is very fine and bright, and not at all cold, and so one can be out with pleasure almost all the day long.

There is nothing to write about and the mail goes to-morrow. The steamer that will carry it lies in harbour now away down under my window; so brave and lazy she looks puffing smoke, with her little rails like threads running round her decks and masts, and little people swarming over her, putting her to rights for to-morrow, when at dawn she will gather up her harness and away. Oh, how cruel if doing her duty she is done to death by our enemies. But one cannot afford to think of that. So good-bye, my own sister, and get well quick. Be quite well when this reaches you.

Your R. X NURSE.

LETTER XXXVI

*November 30th.*

YOU will get rather a shock when you read this letter, for my worst forebodings have been realized—did I say I had forebodings? Well, I had. I have been recalled for nothing more nor less than to be reprimanded. I have not disgraced you in any sense at all, my darling; my conscience is quite clear on that point, but I have failed to live up to your expectations. At least my “good qualities” have not been acknowledged by the world outside as you imagined they would be, and all my faults and failings have been recorded in a book as if it were the last day and trumpeted forth to me, or so it seems. I had no justification, no excuses ready. Indeed, if I had they would have merely made matters worse. There is no reasoning with the powers that be—“They” are as unassailable as Divine Providence.

The moving finger writes and having writ  
Moves on: nor all thy piety nor wit

## LETTERS

Shall lure it back to cancel half a line,  
Nor all thy tears wash out a line of it.

The Superintendent to whom I have been committed is the night Sister under whom I worked when we landed. She showed more interest in me this time. She said when I went into her office, almost nervously: "This is just as unpleasant for me as it is for you, I want you to understand that" (I thought of my little brother, who, when my mother said that it hurt her as much as it hurt him, to whip him, said, "You try it!"); "and I also want so very much to clear up this unpleasantness, with as little fuss as possible—so you will try, will you not, to meet me half way? We must get an answer to each of these—eh, yes, I was going to say, almost ridiculous charges, so that they will satisfy the Heads of Departments, but more especially the Head of the V.A.D. out here, who is rather distressed about it. If it were not for that, you would probably never have heard from us at all."

"What are the charges?" I asked concisely.

"They are general," she said musingly; "very indefinite; it is the number of witnesses which goes against you."

"Number of witnesses?"

"I should say number of people you have offended."

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"All of my own sex?" I asked gently.

"I should think you have been very wanting in tact," she suggested as quietly.

"Who are the people?" I asked.

"Your contemporaries, without exception, with whom you have been working."

"Without exception?"

She went over the names. Of course the Bloodless One; but Fluff? Stock? and Shack? Their names were like dagger-thrusts in my heart.

"Sit down," she said kindly. "Now tell me what you have done to offend so many people?"

"I have lived hourly trying to please them!"

"Yet—they say you have been overbearing in manner, insolent—in silence, I fancy—to those over you, disobliging to those under you. Familiar with the orderlies; slack with the subordinates; and talkative to the patients."

Familiar! Me! The Red Cross man they must mean. Talkative! To O'Shaunassy and Tuck, I suppose. Well, thank God for that. But how I had been watched.

"Yet the Hospital ran most successfully, did it not, when I was in charge?" I blurted out.

"None of the Staff were dissatisfied. The patients were happy and got on well."

"It was quite an accident your being left in

## LETTERS

charge. But to give you due credit no complaint at all has been made by the Staff, on the contrary ; but the Senior Relieving Sister who has gone up to take over, reports that ' everything is in a muddle ' ; in fact that slackness is rife and discipline is at a standstill."

" But it's not true."

The Superintendent looked at me for a moment, and then she got up and put her hand on my shoulder,

" Whatever is true or not true," she said, " I am going to take your word for it. I mean—that you did your best. But you must see that in some way things have not been very satisfactory either to yourself, or to us. And so I am going to remove you from that unit . . . will that displease you ? "

" Could you transfer me home ? I want to go home."

This was weak. But I felt weak.

" That is not—game."

" Do you want me then to justify my existence to those people ? "

" It would be impossible. There is a proverb about it, about hanging a dog. But I will justify your name to the Authorities. You shall not be hung officially ! I will explain that there has been some misunderstanding. Perhaps"—she looked at me kindly, and smiled as though hesitating a



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moment whether to continue or not—" though we find it hard to see why so much is hard to bear in our lives ; so apparently useless, so painful, and so sorrowful, it must be so meant for our ultimate good ; and not alone ours, but for the common good. That God after all knows what He is about, that each individual is compelled by a stronger force than he is aware of, and that we should give ourselves as faithfully and kindly as we can to any work that He chooses to give, in His great scheme of things. . . . How else could we bear this War ? "

" How nice of you to talk like this ! " I cried impulsively. " I will try to look on the move in that light. But you must understand that this has been a great shock to me. Where will you send me ? "

" That I cannot decide at once. But you need a rest. You have worked very hard up there. Yes, we know that. So make the most of a slack time here ; for a fortnight, perhaps. "

" Can you give me no idea of what you might want me to do ? "

" Now, " she pursed up her lips and gazed at me, " would you—I meant to wait, and weigh, and judge, but I see no need to, now—would you go with a relief party with the Head of the V.A.D.

## LETTERS

if it can be arranged ; to an uncertain indefinite place? It would be very hard work, the life would be trying, the circumstances hard, but I believe you would be cut out for it. May I put your name down for that? "

\* \* \* \* \*

So instead of coming any nearer to you, my darling, I am arranging to go further away. Oh, are you *quite* well as your letters say? Is it right to go? Oh, my darling sister it was you yourself taught me to take the *difficult* path.

Your R. X NURSE.

LETTER XXXVII

*December 3rd.*

**I**T is the middle of the night. . . . This is a dreadful letter which I have to write to you—it wrings my heart to write—but it soothes it too. It strengthens and helps me so having such a friend as you. . . .

It all began, of course, weeks ago, but I did not know. I would not know. I love him. Now I know that I love him. What is the touchstone that lights one up and causes this extraordinary knowledge?

It all began yesterday—yesterday, dear God?—at the breakfast table. He just walked in and sat down in the chair opposite me, and all the ice and bitterness melted out of my heart, for ice and bitterness there was there. And well it would have been had it remained. What is that you say, “A heart of ice to ourselves (or is it steel that cannot melt), a heart of flesh to our neighbours,

a heart of fire to God." But how impossible ! . . .

He walked into the dining-saloon—how prosaic this sounds—and sat down and had breakfast with me at the dear little table in the sunshine by the window overlooking the sea, and——

Then there was an earthquake. At least there was for me. "Rose," he said, "I want you to marry me to-morrow."

And I said : "Ah ! You are already married. Do you not understand ? In my eyes, and in the eyes of all Catholics, you are already married !"

And then quite as suddenly as in a real earthquake, came down upon us both the most awful, the most appalling, the most bewildering storm—of emotions. I loved him and knew it, and wanted to marry him and could not bear to say him nay—and I was in the storm. He loved me, and knew that I loved him (how, I know not), and saw no reason why I should not marry him—and he was in the storm.

Passion shrieked and howled (in a deadly silence) like wind in a rage : sorrow rained steadily, soakingly : love flashed like lightning, feelings boomed like thunder, pain beat like hail . . . and then, I think, to him a little ray of hope shone through the clouds, for in the midst of this rocking world I heard him say :

"But you are not a Catholic ! Rose ! Rose, you

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must come away with me and talk this out. Come !  
You can't refuse ! ”

I could not.

In a trice we were in a taxi being whirled away  
into more storm, . . .

Sister, I was in his arms once more.

“ Darling ! Darling ! ” he whispered, and held  
me close. And I clung to him. I loved him so.  
I wanted him, and I wanted protection as I never  
had before in my life, so that I wanted never to  
leave those sheltering arms. And . . . the wind  
went on howling, and the rain beating, and the  
lightning flashing, telling me it was wrong, wrong.  
I was not going to marry him.

\* \* \* \* \*

But the wildest storm must slacken and rain  
cease. A mist came to muffle up emotion—for a  
time, though the Colonel went on pleading, pleading,  
and I went on refusing, refusing.

“ You will listen to reason now that I hold you  
\_\_\_\_\_ ”

“ No ! No ! ”

“ Oh, yes you will, for I love you and you love  
me, 'tis beyond argument. And I am a man, not  
a white knight, and you are the most adorable  
woman in the world, not a white rose. Come out

## LETTERS

of your dreams ! Come out of your dreams, my beloved."

" This is not reason," I said, " but sheer madness. We must be reasonable, and you must realize, *must*, MUST, that I am not going to marry you, or ever see you again."

" What are you going to do then ? "

" I don't know. I don't know. But you must leave me alone to fight it out. You must go away. And I must go away. Anything else is quite impossible."

" But why is it impossible ? "

" Because I think it is wrong to marry a divorced person."

" That is absolute nonsense. You have nothing to back you up. You have not even religious scruples ! "

" But I have. I have."

" You are not a Catholic ? " How he repeated it.

" But I'm going to be. Oh, my darling, I am going to be."

" You are going to give me up because of impossible scruples ? Do you know anything about the Catholic religion, with its tremendous superstitions, its inconceivable doctrines ? Have you not learnt that religion is to every man, to *prove his own soul* ; to live bravely and cleanly ; to be thankful for good

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gifts ; and to love, when love comes, to the end. You do know this. Your life proves it. Your sympathy, your kindness, your joy, your understanding, all those dear and wonderful gifts which make me love you so enormously. Oh, I cannot give you up now that I have found you, my princess. Now and for ever you will put these vain imaginings on one side, and to-morrow you will marry me and you will be mine 'to have and to hold' for ever."

"No ! No !"

"I am going to the Front in a week. But for one week we will taste Heaven. And then you must go home to my fairies, and love them, and wait for me. Oh ! do you think that I could have stood by and allowed you to be sent down from the Hospital like that, if I had not known that it would make things easy. Do you think I could have borne to see your dear face getting whiter and whiter, and drawn into puzzlement and distress if I had not known that soon I would be the knight come to rescue my princess in distress ?"

What nonsense this sounds written down, yet . . . I loved it so.

Yes, I was weak, as weak as chaff in a gale, but something gave me strength to repeat that eternal No ! No ! No ! and to say at last :

## LETTERS

"Dear heart, I love you so. But this must cease, and at once. It is quite an impossible situation. The strongest instinct a woman possesses is her desire to be kissed by the man she loves. How can I resist it with you sitting there beside me? . . . There's a bitter cup to be drunk; not this fruit of vines which lies so temptingly close. Let us drink it down at once and depart. Take me back, like the best of men, and leave me."

"We are certainly in a whirlpool," answered the Colonel gently. "Let us get out of it by all means without delay. But need we sip either cup just yet? Let us make a compact: I am strong, my life has made me so, and you—you can trust me. Let us have this day at least in our lives as we were before, the best of friends, not lovers. See, I will not touch you all the day long! Your motto shall be mine for once: "Renunciation."

So we spent the later day like two children in all happiness and innocence.

Many people would not believe this, but many people will not know! You know and you will believe. Of course our Guardian Angels were with us protecting us with great strong wings unfolded.

. . .

We had lunch at a lonely inn at a wild and lovely spot on the coast. Then we went along the sea-



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shore where the rocks were sweet with seaweed and the sand was sweet with God's scavenging, and the water was sweet with the sun's benediction. We walked miles ; then under odorous pines we rested our tired bodies, and still more tired minds, and the Colonel whispered " Life of my life ! Heart of my heart ! "

\* \* \* \* \*

If this was sin, " as I do suppose it be," it was the sin of angels. White clouds floated in ethereal blueness above the frieze of pines, and the pungent needles below upon the greensward made a cradle fit for the gods. We grew intensely happy, and were entirely silent out in this place, for words were useless, only tending to remind us of sad things that were, and had to come. It was so sweet to be alone together, so essentially alone—so bitter sweet. And not all day did the storm return.

It was in the freshness of the late afternoon that we drove towards home ; getting out at the end of the Promenade to walk, treading then on air, breathing zephyr breezes, bathed in golden twilight. The sun set in a great hoop of fiery crimson and burnished brass, melting in seas of tenderest green. I was exalted, enraptured, enthralled . . . I was in love.

Of our conversation only scraps return to me.

## LETTERS

*The Colonel* : " No one is strong enough to break the joyous bonds of love once they are fettered. You cannot throw back into the face of the gods the gorgeous gift of love."

*Me* : " The gods were devils, and devils I have heard men say can give the most sumptuous gifts of all ! But they rob you in return, of virtue, and everlasting life. They rob you of your soul. Oh ! don't begin this agony again. Don't ! Don't ! Besides, the car is following along the road like a great black dog, and it has eyes—at least its chauffeur has ; and you are in uniform."

*The Colonel* : " My darling, I don't give you up yet ! "

*Me* : " You must. I am going to send you away directly we get in. Or better still, you get into the taxi now and go. Go at once. I do so want to see you all the time, and I must never see you again ! "

I sobbed, a dry hard sob.

*The Colonel* : " All this for a mere whim."

*Me* : " It's not a whim. It's conviction."

*The Colonel* : " Founded on what ? "

*Me* : " On Christ's religion."

*The Colonel* : " That's nonsense ; surely the law knows better than you ! And you are not even a Catholic nor your fathers before you or before

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them: Are you, you fragile little person, going to make a stand alone against the mighty army of your forbears, and of those you love, and those who love you?"

*Me*: "Oh, no, no, no! You are right; I have nothing to stand on."

*The Colonel*: "Nothing. Why, I offer you the cleanest and best of loves: and you treat it as if it were sin! Don't you understand, my darling, that I would not hurt a hair of your head—that I offer you marriage to-morrow, which means between us a glorious soul union—a beautiful friendship. Till now I have held myself silent, loving you day by day, waiting for this day when you would acknowledge me your prince. Would you shatter the joy I have at last won?"

*Me*: "Oh, my darling, you break my heart."

*The Colonel*: "Why, it's you! Why break both our hearts indeed? There would be no scandal in your marrying me. My children need you. My mother wants you. And besides——"

*Me*: Sob.

*The Colonel*: "Come, we will not spoil our beautiful day with useless arguments. My love will speak to you all night. And to-morrow? I hope for to-morrow!"

\* \* \* \*

## LETTERS

After dinner—yes, we had dinner together, what could I do about it—alone in the hotel with a common dining-room, and no one to turn to?—I stood up, and I felt my finger tips cold and clammy pressing into the palms of my hands.

“Colonel,” I said. “Dear man, make it easy for me! . . . This is Good-bye.”

He said nothing, but accompanied me to the foot of the stairs, and I felt his eyes watching me ascend. And then—I fled down the corridor into my room, burst into tears and double locked the door. Why, I know not, since I could not lock the fiends out! But I meant if I had philandered—which I confess I had done—I would philander no longer.

So began my fight. Oh! how those fiends fought! They dragged me by chains. “Come! Come!”

I fell on my knees and sobbed. “Jesus, Jésus.”

\* \* \* \* \*

At about half-past nine, I suppose, when I had become almost unconscious with misery—for grief anæsthetizes us to some extent, thank God, or we could not bear so much—there was a knock at the door, and a note addressed in the Colonel’s neat precise handwriting was given me. In one dreadful

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moment all my benumbed feelings were alive again. My head whirled and my whole body trembled as I opened the letter :

“ I must see you again, please, please, please. It is very important.

“ LEO.”

The fiends pulled the “ Come ” chains, almost paralyzing me, but my hand wrote without hesitation across the end of the paper : “ No.”

And I gave it to the waiting servant, shut the door, sat down in a chair and, putting my face in my cold wet hands, suffered. Oh ! how I suffered.

But even thus was I not to be let off ! Again came a knock, again a note. “ No answer this time, miss,” from the sleepy boy, and I was alone. I locked the door, staggered back to the chair and read :

“ MY DARLING,—

“ How obstinate you are ! And how I love you !

“ But I must see you : because a telegram has just come saying that at dawn the day after tomorrow I am to sail in the hospital ship now lying in harbour.

“ So you will come downstairs now, and see me,

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will you not? Oh, you *must* come. And then we will arrange one of two plans. 1. That you marry me in the morning—the special licence is ready, as you know. 2. That you go home (which would be in any case). And—Oh, I *must* see you! You cannot let me go like this. I love you so. It is no use writing ‘No’ on this as you did just now. I shall wait in any case all night in the conservatory. You may not want to come at first; and then change your mind. But oh, come at once, I implore you, for my heart is burning for you.

“LEO.”

\* \* \* \* \*

So began my vigil.

Sister! How can I describe that utter agony of contending emotions. I fought with the fiends until I cried out.

And all the time was the knowledge of another soul sitting below waiting, waiting. All his manly intention of purpose, his deeper, more tenacious mind calling me, calling. I felt that he had made, for the time being at least, all experience, all cares, all hopes, all fears subservient to this one idea. He wanted me, and called me, and longed for me. What hope had I to resist, except in God, who is stronger than all, for the telepathy of our souls was fused.

## OF A V.A.D.

I tried to pray. Oh, how I tried to pray, but conventional prayers would not come ; only little scraps that you had taught me, smiling your ineffable smile, and whispering when you said good-night.

“Soul of Christ, sanctify me,  
Body of Christ, save me  
Blood of Christ . . .”

But Christ the loving Jesus seemed to have turned His face from me. The “Come Fiend” hammered, hammered, “Come ! Come !” or whispered, “It is not wrong !” “It is not wrong !” “Who are you to throw love in the face of the gods ? Are you not past your first youth ? Do you not want a child ? Oh, a child ! a child ! A little boy of your own and his ! A little girl with laughing eyes and clinging hands. . . . If you marry him, you will be nearer to God ; for you will go home, you will have your sister again, your church, your clergyman. Clergymen would not think it wrong ! You need not change your religion. Religions are all the same. Come ! Come !” . . .

“Jesus, Jesus, Jesus  
In Thy wounds hide me,  
Suffer me not to be separated from Thee.

\* \* \* \* \*

## LETTERS

I find I am writing to you. Four o'clock struck just now. I have been writing for hours. It is cold, I suppose, but I do not feel cold. . . .

Leo! Leo! An owl hoots outside my window at intervals, weirdly seeming to repeat his name. Since the dying sounds of day life, which also seemed to urge me downstairs have passed, I have heard no other sound.

Oh! for the "joy that cometh in the morning" to end this vigil. . . . A little baby boy. . . .

" . . . From the malicious enemy defend me,"

" Oh Lord, help me."

The owl again. Does *he* hear it? Is he sitting alone in that dusky conservatory?

Leo! Leo! It is a white moonlight night, cloudless and starry. I can see to write this, and to read the only love-letter I have ever had from him, by its light alone. "How obstinate you are."

Oh! not obstinate, not cruel, not unreasonable. It is surely my own inner conscience admonishing me! . . .

—But who am I to say that this is wrong, against all my friends? I will go down to him. He shall not be lonely and miserable all his life. . . . (This resolution made me stand up, wash my face, and tidy my hair, I would go down to him. My hand



## OF A V.A.D.

was on the door handle . . . and a Voice spoke, a noiseless awful voice :

“ Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again ! ”

The water of passion ! Christ said that to the woman at the well. The woman with many husbands. Leo, then . . . would thirst again ! . . . No. No.

“ Oh Passion of *Christ*, comfort me,  
Oh Good Jesus, help me,  
Lord, help me. Christ, help me.”

\* \* \* \* \*

At dawn, numb now, feeling half dead, I went and looked in the glass. Was that me gazing back at me ? Dishevelled hair, white face, deep blue lines ; haggard, aged, ill. I turned away and leant on the window sill. Trembling, for my own eyes frightened me, they were so haunted, colourless, and full of pain.

Oh Christ, is this Thy child ? Dost Thou love us then and so chasten ? Oh Christ, come to me. I want Thee. Want Thee. Want Thee. Not for myself alone, but for him also. Make this right. Smooth this down. Ease this pain. Art Thou in the Dawn ? Art Thou in the Heaven ? Lovest Thou me, poor little me ?

\* \* \* \* \*

## LETTERS

A bird flew out of the thicket singing its morning hymn of praise. Others roused, hopped out, chirped, and shook their wings. The freshness of creation stirred the world. Pearly gave way to rosy dawn, and lights of clearest amber and mauve climbed into the heavens, sending great shoots of colour, spreading over the bowl of night from the rim of the world. Lightening, glorifying, hallowing the night.

“I am the Light of the world.”

“He that overcometh, I will in no wise cast out.” These words flashed through my brain. Then I saw the Colonel come from the hotel, and walk through the garden; his head was bowed, he stooped and looked old, his hair seemed greyer, his step less light. He did not look up, but I drew back, and knelt.

“God bless you! bless you! bless you!” I breathed. “God bless, and keep, and help you. I love you with all my heart—but He will comfort you.”

\* \* \* \* \*

I undressed and had a bath, and dressed again, after the maid had brought tea. Then I went out, for I could not rest. Rest? I was like a caged but exhausted bird that felt it must flutter, and struggle, and resist till it died.

## OF A V.A.D.

I wandered down by-ways, and by hedges. I did not know where until I heard the tinkle, tinkle of a church bell. It was a little Catholic church that I came to, and as it stood open and I had wandered a long way and was tired, I crept in.

There was a great stillness there, so that at last I could rest and pray for him, for the anguish I had read in that bowed beloved form was almost more than I could bear. Surely God, who is so good and great, would right it all for him at least : would ease his heart : would calm his mind : would give him work, and forgetfulness. . . . Presently I became aware that the Priest was offering Mass. The bell rang, and I knelt all dazed and stupid as I was. . . . Then the bell rang again. Oh, how quiet the church was . . . 'what peace. How fresh and sweet the morning air was ; birds sang, golden light flooded the sanctuary . . . and the bell rang again.

Then I knew that the Lord was there. My spirit flew to meet Him. Crouched at His pierced feet. Kissed and adored them.

\* \* \* \* \*

R. X.

5 p.m. *December 3rd.*

That was this morning. I have slept all day ;

## LETTERS

suffering has fled and heaviness has come upon me.  
I shall sleep all night. He giveth His beloved sleep.

Your R. X NURSE.

P.S. It is days before the mail goes, but I shall go downstairs and post this at once. It hurts to keep it. If I meet the Colonel I am quite strong. And—oh, I do want to say good-bye kindly.

LETTER XXXVIII

*December 4th.*

WHO do you think was in the vestibule when I got down there? The Black man. He pounced upon me, asked me to have tea with him, and then positively flung two chairs out into the conservatory, and when I had taken one, flung himself into the other. He was flushed with suppressed excitement and his eyes sparkled.

"I am going forward," he said, "starting to-morrow, and I had to come and find you—I have to apologize—only I'm glad."

"What a way to apologize! What a bad man you are! Let's talk of something else!"

"No. For I am not a bad man, honestly I am not."

"No? Then——" truth out, sadly wanting in tact, I suppose, but I was still numb with my night watch, and with grief, "What about Fluff?"

"Well, what about her!" He leant back, tilting

## LETTERS

his chair, looking at me through half-closed lids.

“ Well . . . You are not a bad man ? ”

“ What’s that got to do with it ? ”

“ Why, you know.”

“ Now,” he said, suddenly very serious, “ it’s my turn to question. Will you answer patiently ? ” An extraordinary look of gravity and tenderness came into his dark eyes—and now he leant forward.

“ What about the Colonel ? ” He waved aside my consternation and dismay. “ It’s been going on all the time, you know—on his side. Not given any one else a chance. In self-defence—well, there was Fluff. Oh, God, don’t think I am a cad ! I am perhaps—but I did not know how else to play the game. I want you. I’ve wanted you all the time, and you would not look at me. And it’s been lonely. I only had the Mouse, you see. He is all right professionally. But as a companion ! Paugh ! Can you imagine a big black bear like me living alone with a Mouse ? I got into mischief. I laid trains to get you to myself, but it always failed. Fluff invariably turned up, so we became friends. But she knew I was playing, and she knew the Mouse wanted to pay her attention, and we both did it to annoy him. I took her, and shook her, and dropped her to annoy him. Don’t you under-

## OF A V.A.D.

stand? So that it is not my affair. My affair is—are you going to marry the Colonel? ”

“ You said just now you were not a bad man. You are worse than bad, you are cruel and heartless.”

“ I don’t know about the former. But the latter. Alas, I wish I were ! ”

“ Did you ask Fluff to marry you ? ”

“ Ye gods and little fishes, *No.* ”

“ Why ? ”

“ Because I want you.”

“ Well, you won’t get me. Nothing in heaven or earth would persuade me to allow you to get me.”

“ Then you are going to marry the Colonel ? ”

“ How persistent, how rude—how unbearable you are ! ”

I think he saw the pain brimming in the eyes I turned to him, for he turned his away consciously.

Kindly but angrily he then muttered, “ so you cannot love me ! ”

“ Black man,” I said, “ I do love you. I love you like a mother. And that’s hopeless, you know.”

“ Oh ! ” he said, growling like the bear he had likened himself to. “ How angry you make me ! And if I say that I am going to rush into danger,

## LETTERS

perhaps be killed; because you will have nothing to do with me ; if I say any of the things I meant to say, you will repeat ' Black man, I love you. I love you like a mother ' ! " He mimicked me unkindly for a moment, then fell silent.

" Why did you cry just now ? I wonder why you cried," he burst forth suddenly a minute or two later, leaning towards me.

" I didn't cry."

" You didn't *sob* : but your eyes——"

" I want to get back to work, Black man. ' Work is Worship,' you know."

" It is a penance. Why do you need to do penance ? I know how good you are ! . . . Well"—tempestuously—" if you won't marry me, I must be off."

" One minute. Now sit down. Do something for me, Black man ! No, don't speak. Wait. You know you like Fluff very much, really tremendously, don't you ? You get on awfully well with her. She is really sound and sweet and a dear. . . . Marry Fluff."

" She would not have me."

" Ask her. I beg you, give her the same chance you have given me. We are not all unkind."

He stood up. Then he sat down. He stretched his arms and his legs. He yawned. Then he



## OF A V.A.D.

laughed. He put back his great black head and exulted to the palm leaves above him. His laughter was a much more pleasant expression of emotion than any tears of mine had been ; and I smiled with him.

“ You dear ! ” he said. “ You are a perfect dear ! I will wire at once. But—I’ve got something to ask you to do, that you *can* do. It’s a serious thing . . . I think a lot about it. . . . It’s difficult too . . . I was born black. I can’t help it. Will you . . . will you pray for me sometimes ? I need it, and I may fall, and I should like to think that you were thinking of me in that way. Even if I am engaged to Fluff. Perhaps I may die before I see her again. Do you see ? ”

“ Yes. I see. Black man, I do love you very, very much—like a mother. You are a dear too. I will pray for you, though my prayers are not worth much. But you will be very happy, I know that. You will put me entirely out of your thoughts now, will you not, and you will love Fluff with all your heart and soul.”

Our heads were very near together. I could see the muscles of his face working under his dark skin, his heels were dug firmly into the soil in front of him, his elbows on the chair, fingers tipping in front of him.

## LETTERS

I looked up and saw the Colonel coming towards us. I felt sorry that I had leant so near the Black man, but I was glad, oh, so glad, to see the Colonel.

"I have come to say good-bye," he said simply. "The boat is going earlier than we expected. It sails in an hour."

"I will go and send that wire," said the Black man thoughtfully, and disappeared.

My beloved looked so adorable, so altogether desirable, so brave and chivalrous as he stood there that all my heart went out in my cry: "My darling," and I sprang up and took his hands.

"Good-bye, my beloved," he said. Then stooped and gazed into my eyes, till his drowned themselves in my tears.

"Do you remember," I whispered,

"With all my will, but much against my heart

We two now part.

My Very Dear,

Our solace is, the sad road lies so clear

It needs no art,

In our opposed paths to persevere.

Go thou to East. I West.

We will not say

There's any hope, it is so far away,

But, O my Best . . ."

"Kiss me," he breathed, and when I lifted my head, his lips burnt themselves in the fire of mine

\* \* \* \*

OF A V.A.D.

till I lost momentary consciousness and swooned.  
He was gone.

“I have sent the telegram!” said the voice of  
the Black man.

\* \* \* \* \*

Darling, I cannot write any more. . . .

Your R. X NURSE.

## LETTER XXXIX

*December 16th.*

**B**EFORE sending that last letter by the mail leaving on the 9th, I tried quite hopelessly to finish it. I think I must be breaking down, or something—I cry so easily and cannot sleep, and I could not even write to you last week.

The Black man had his answer from Fluff in the shape of a joyous letter of acquiescence, and he has gone off quite happily with his Expedition, so I am quite alone ; and dull with misery.

I went to see the Catholic priest one day, Monseigneur they call him, but—they never seem to want to have anything to do with us, do they? I will try and explain how he dealt with me. It was simple and direct enough, but hard and dry. He did not seem to wish to reach out and help me. Why do they make you feel that they do not want you to become a Catholic, when you tell them that you do.

## OF A V.A.D.

"Are you quite sure?" he insisted.

"Yes, quite."

"Give me all your reasons for, and against, for I suppose there are some."

I gave them. He helped me out marvellously by weighing this, discarding that, clearing up as we went along, showing me "truth in the inmost parts."

"And you really want to become a Catholic? Do you realize what a difficult religion it is, its obligations, the sacrifices it demands?"

"I have said so, Father."

"Yet your love for your sister who belongs to the Ritualistic Church of England is a stumbling block! Now tell me. When did you last go to Early Service, as you call it, in your church?"

"On Sunday. I go every Sunday morning."

"You must stop that at once if you are really sincere. Inquire also how long you will be here, and I will see what can be done. Meanwhile, I will pray for you at the Mass every morning. And you will come to that whenever you can. Our Blessed Lord will Himself draw you then."

"Oh, He has drawn me. He has spoken to me."

He could see I was dissatisfied, impatient. And though he expected me to go then I sat on, and

gazed at him. "Is that all you have to say to me?" I asked sadly.

"Tell me again now! You really have come to me because you do not want to marry this man who is a divorcee?"

"Yes, Father."

"And you care for him?"

"With all my heart and soul, Father."

"Then it would not be fair to yourself to receive you at once. I make out that you are quite indefinite in your views too. They might change. Forgive me if I touch the hurt, but we run no risk in Holy Church. You are not capable of thinking just now. But Almighty God knows about it all and He will help you."

After a deep silence while I fingered the fringe of the red tablecloth and gazed with some inner awe on a picture of the Christ (I do not know if it is good or bad—as a painting—but I do know it satisfied me and made me realize Him), and Monseigneur sat with his deep eyes on the ground, his arms folded and his hand holding his chin, he said—"It is the time that distresses me in your case. How long will you be here?"

"But I want to be received at once!"

His fathomless gaze met my surprised one calmly.

"Impossible."

## OF A V.A.D.

I began to cry.

"See, my child," he said, "these tears prove that you are overwrought! How can we receive you into the Church when you are overdone—by work and emotion."

"You Catholics never seem to want us!" I exclaimed.

"God Himself knows that we do. We live for nothing else but to help souls, to save them if we can. But we must not be impatient."

"Oh, why won't you receive me?"

"My child, I will ask you a few questions to show you: if you can bear them? It is quite clear that you are unhappy, and I do not want to tax an overburdened heart, but it is also clear that you want to do the right thing for God. Are you willing to give up everything in the wide world for Him, if He asks it?"

"He has already asked it," I said passionately. "Everything has been taken away from me, everything, and I don't know why."

"By everything, what exactly?"

"Work, human love, and consolation: the little joys of life, that count for so much; friends; belief in the Church of England."

"My freshness spent its wavering shower i' the dust;  
And now my heart is as a broken font,

## LETTERS

Wherein tear-drippings stagnate, spilt down ever  
From the dank thoughts that shiver  
Upon the sighful branches of my mind."

He smiled; it was an extraordinarily understanding smile.

"I am glad you said that," he said. "Francis Thompson was a Catholic. His was a tempestuous life, he suffered greatly: and he was very wonderful. So you appreciate him! Now we will begin again. You don't know how long you will be here: you want to become a Catholic at once: you have been to Communion in the English Church every Sunday: you have had no faith at all except that which you gather from that Church. Now let me see! Have you any difficulty in believing in Transubstantiation? No. So. Often the Anglicans have not! And you also believe, you say, in the Holy Catholic Church—but do you?"

"Yes, I do."

"That the Catholic or Universal Church is supreme, that the true Church is Apostolical—that is, being the true Church she must teach the identical doctrines delivered to the Apostles; and that her ministers must derive their powers from them in uninterrupted succession; so that no Church can claim to be the true one whose doctrines differ."

"But the Catholic Church of England——"



## OF A V.A.D.

"There is no such thing!"

"But, Father——"

"Yes, my child."

"I believe that there is such a thing! My sister belongs to that Church, she taught me everything Catholic. . . . She taught me the love of Our Lady——" I paused.

He did not speak.

"Father!"

"Yes, my child."

"Help me, Father!"

"I can only help you by bothering you. I don't want to bother you just now."

"What am I to do?"

"Just wait. Come to the Mass—and study our Catechism."

"Oh, Father! My heart is broken and you say 'study our Catechism.' It's most dreadfully hard——"

"You will come to instruction to me too, while you can?"

"Will you have me?"

"Most decidedly I will. Every other day while you are here. And every day you will go to the Mass? 7.30 a.m. Here is the Catechism, and my blessing and prayers."

\* \* \* \* \*

## LETTERS

So this morning I went to High Mass at the Cathedral, instead of to Church parade, where the troops sit in their bored rows, and sing in their heavy way. The Cathedral is full of "mercy and peace, righteousness and truth," as the psalm puts it. And you feel His Presence there, as in all Catholic churches, but my heart aches too much to say prayers. I feel so sore and beaten. How badly I have taken this reverse, have I not? But then it has been rather bad. I have only you, my precious one, left! Even work has gone. If only there was some work to plunge into. It is so tiresome too, waiting for it, to be told nothing about it, not to have the expectation of preparation even. When the time comes, I shall just have to slip into place and carry out the preparations of other people! That may be rather trying. It is always more pleasant to arrange things one's own way.

\* \* \* \* \*

Meanwhile I try to unravel the Catechism of the Catholic Church. What an antidote for an aching heart! Though it certainly arrests one's attention, and makes one think.

"God sees us and continually watches over us."

"God made the world to make known His power and wisdom, and for man's use and benefit."

## OF A V.A.D.

“God made us to know, love and serve Him here on earth : and to see and enjoy Him for ever in heaven.”

\* \* \* \* \*

The Catechism was in my hand when they brought me this cable about you.

What does it mean ?

You must be frightfully ill.

Oh, my dear, *be well* when you get this or my heart will indeed be broken !

R. X.

## LETTER XL

*December 18th.*

THERE is an auxiliary mail going out to-night, and then not one for a fortnight. So this will come almost as soon as my last, but it will tell you how much I love you and long for you: more and more indeed every hour since that fateful telegram came. The Relief Expedition is now not going to start until about the first of the year, and as I am entirely ready there is nothing for me to do at all—but to think. They tell me to rest, but my brain will not be chidden. Oh! why are you, too, ill. . . .

\*            \*            \*            \*

Every day I go to the Catholic church and kneel there, and pray for you and for Leo, and for patience for myself. And I am beginning to see things in a more reasonable light. We are not, not any of us, not one poor soul who falls in battle; we are not whirled about like useless leaves. He has some

## OF A V.A.D.

care of us. We are each one of us God's children, and He deals with us in the way that draws us back to Him. That poem you sent haunts and helps me so wonderfully. Why did you send it *now*! It seems as if my life were written in those burning words. I demanded so much, and He asks :

“How hast thou merited—  
Of all man's clotted clay the dingiest clot?  
Alack! thou knowest not  
How little worthy of any love thou art.”

If Tom had not been killed I should have married and settled down, and never have come to you, and then—I should never have known those “Feet that follow after.”

“Still with unhurrying chase,  
And unperturbèd pace,  
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,  
Came on the following Feet,  
And a Voice above their beat—  
‘Naught shelters thee, who wilt not shelter Me.’”

You showed me the shining path of self-sacrifice, of self-immolation, and of virtue. But did I take it? Perhaps not, though I mean to now. The work taught me much, and you taught me much, but not to give up everything, everything as those wounded boys have done without a murmur, and

## LETTERS

with smiles that—our soldiers, our boys—they have taught me.

“ Ah, must—

Designer infinite !—

Ah, must Thou char the wood ere Thou canst limn with it ? ”

Last night you seemed to come and wake me up in my little bed. Why did you do that ?

“ Sister ! ” I found myself saying, and there I was sitting up holding out my hands to the empty darkness.

“ This is all rather much for one’s brain ! ” I supposed, as I turned and tried to sleep once more.

“ Sister ! ” Again I was sitting up in bed.

Then a third time you came, but I did not rise, for you knelt beside me and took me in your arms.

You have never done that before, have you ? Nearer and nearer you drew me. I laid my weary weary head on your breast and you spoke to me. You told me things past understanding : that we must not exalt ourselves ; that we must try to be simple in our thoughts like Our Lord ; that faith grew from bending our will to Godward ; that charity was the most lovely thing in the world, and the most hard ; and that the most sordid, uninteresting work faithfully done is full of merit. What did

## OF A V.A.D.

you not tell me. Oh, you fragrant flower of God !  
And then you said :

“ Dear, I must leave you. Pray for me, if . . .  
you . . . please.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Why must you leave me ? What does it mean ?

“ Halts by me that Footstep.”

No ! No !

“ Naked I wait Thy Love’s uplifted stroke !

My harness piece by piece Thou hast hewn from me,  
And smitten me to my knee :  
I am defenceless utterly.”

Oh, sister, He will leave you to me ! . . . You  
have my prayers every day, every hour. My  
darling, you will pray for me too . . . if—you  
please !

— Your R. X NURSE.

## LETTER XLI

*December 28th.*

**M**ONSEIGNEUR found me sobbing in the church. . . . I wanted you so, and Leo, there is always the sodden aching in my heart for Leo.

“My child!” he said.

And all that I could say was, “They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him.”

\* \* \* \* \*

And then somehow it was all arranged that I should come into the Convent until we go away; and rest, and be at peace. So here I am, and indeed no more have I to bear, for I have ceased to kick against the pricks, and when they send for me to go forward, a calm, strong, quiet Red Cross nurse is ready. Not that these Catholics have done anything to influence me, sweet souls; except perhaps to pray, for they will not let me be anything but a passive member of their Church. They simply



## OF A V.A.D.

make possible and urge rest and quiet, and contemplation at the Crib. My little room is white, and the Sisters are in white, and they do not speak, but smile. There is no argument, or tiresomeness, or restlessness here, just peace. And my thoughts of Leo are at peace at last ; for surely he will find that—too !

So, the earthquake and the storm have passed and the Sun has come out after the rain. And the Sun is that " Tremendous Lover," who is the child Jesus. And a great calm is in my heart . . . and nothing matters in the least, except that God is in all. And then too—you seem to be with me all the time. Yet it is not you, but Our Lady, and again not Our Lady, but Light. And I know at last what it all means : it just means this—

" Rise, clasp My hand, and come . . .  
All which I took from thee I did but take,  
Not for thy harms,  
But just that thou might'st seek it in My arms.  
All which thy child's mistake  
Fancies as lost, I have stored for thee at home :  
Rise, clasp My hand, and come."

Your R. X NURSE.

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